WHO WAS SHE?

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WHO WAS SHE?

OR,

THE SOLDIER'S BEST GLORY.

Mrs. Cecilia L. Whiteley

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TO THE GENEROUS FRIEND,

WHO AIDED, COUNSELLED, AND ENCOURAGED ME WHEN THE WAY WAS TOILSOME AND CIRCUMSTANCES DEPRESSING, I GRATEFULLY DEDICATE THIS FIRST LABOR OF MY HEART AND MIND AND HAND.

THE AUTHOR.

New York, August 15, 1870.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

PAGE

THE FARM-HOUSE 13

CHAPTER II.

WHO WAS SHE? 21

CHAPTER III.

THE MYSTERY REMAINS A MYSTERY 30

CHAPTER IV.

LITTLE PHIL MAKES HIS BOW 38

CHAPTER V.

PHIL APPEARS IN A NEW CHARACTER 46

CHAPTER VI.

UNDER THE DAISIES 52

CHAPTER VII.

WHAT COMES OF CATCHING A "CHIPMUNK" 69

CHAPTER VIII.

REPENTANCE 79

CHAPTER XXXIII.

PAGE

THE COURT-BALL..... 287

CHAPTER XXXIV.

BEFORE THE BATTLE..... 293

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE MYSTERY NO LONGER A MYSTERY..... 308

CHAPTER XXXVI.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S LAST RECEPTION..... 320

CHAPTER XXXVII.

SHIRLEY VENTURES ON A FORLORN HOPE, AND MURRAY SEEKS A DOMESTIC ALTAR..... 332

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE DÉNOÛMENT ASTOUNDS DAVIE..... 342

CHAPTER XXXIX.

PHILIP WINS HIS LAST VICTORY..... 352

CHAPTER XL.

DISTINGUISHED ARRIVALS AND DISTINGUISHED DEPARTURES..... 363

CHAPTER XLI.

DULCE DOMUM..... 374

WHO WAS SHE?

CHAPTER I.

THE FARM-HOUSE.

THE summer twilight falling softly around the old Lee homestead was silently shutting up the flowers that the morning sun had kissed into full bloom, and touching the tender green leaves of the maples shading the west windows with a slight suspicion of gloom. Peacefully the night settled down over the harvest hills, until the woodlands near the south meadow were lost in a faint outline of shadows. But the inmates of the Lee farm-house—a moss-grown, angular, old-fashioned structure—gave little heed to the quiet adieu of the sun; for, as it is to all farmers, the slow falling of the midsummer night was always a busy hour with the Lee family—the hour when innumerable chores are to be disposed of, and the afternoon calm is broken by the bustling duties of supper-time.

Mrs. Lee was a perfect embodiment of the true farmer's wife, and knew how to economize both time and labor in her multiplicity of domestic cares. In the midst of the greatest hurry, brisk little Ruth Lee never appeared flustered in manner, discouraged in temper, nor jaded in looks; but, ever gentle and cheerful, her patient, loving life sanctified the arduous toil of every-day existence, and per-

vaded every nook and corner of her pleasant home. It was a clear evening in August, twenty-five years ago, that we introduce the reader to this Ohio homestead, and its broad-shouldered, brawny-handed owner, David Lee. The old weather-embrowned home and sturdy farmer were the pride and boast of the little village of Alden. David, for his thrift, industry, and superior ideas of farming, was considered as authority among his neighbors on the important subjects of stock-raising, subsoiling, draining, irrigating, enriching land, and the like. His farm was unanimously conceded to be among the best in the State; his fine stock could safely challenge the best that grazed in Ohio's rich valleys, and his genial, brown-eyed wife was loved by every one on whom their kindly light had shone.

On this August evening the last cow of ten had been milked, and Hetty Smith — Mrs. Lee's maid-of-all-work, or "help," as she was usually designated by her sprightly little mistress — was busy in the dairy, actively engaged in straining the milk into the brightest of pans from the brightest of pails. Not one of your modern strainers, but a long narrow piece of linen, white as snow, dexterously held by Hetty's experienced hands tight across one-half the pail, answered the purpose admirably. With a quick rush the milk, warm and foaming, splashed through the filtering-cloth into the burnished pans one after another, until the long row was filled and carefully set to "rise."

Hetty plumed herself greatly on her butter and cheese-making, not permitting even her mistress within the sacred precincts of the dairy, save as an applauding spectator. She was extremely particular regarding the scalding and rinsing of her "milk things," and would allow no ordinary dishcloth or wiper to come in contact with the dazzling purity of her cherished pans and pails, strainers and cream-pots. Hetty's power was supreme in the butter region, and while she clattered in the dairy, Mrs. Lee flitted noiselessly

from kitchen to pantry, intent on arranging the supper-table, occasionally stopping in her light walk — you would guess without being told, that it was a mother's heart that modulated the soft footfalls — to peep into the little willow cradle where slumbered her fair-haired baby. Not the first baby — ah! no; little Vida was the fourth. But the others slept out in the grave-yard, silent and still, cradled in tiny coffins, and covered by the summer daisies. Mrs. Lee had tenderly laid her little ones from her arms into the grave, trusting in God that it was best; and now, Vida, the eight-months old darling, was the only one left of the four rosy babies that came amid joy and blessings to brighten the old Lee farm-house. Three little mounds on the hillside; three little tablets recording the briefness of three little lives — that was all. But they left the homestead desolate and the willow cradle empty. After a time another came, and the mother called her Vida, the girl-namesake of the father. Farmer Lee poohed and pished the idea at first; but his wife insisted, and so, secretly pleased, he acquiesced, although protesting that what Vida had to do with his plain name of David was more than he could tell. But little Ruth silenced him by imparting, with a convincing kiss on his ruddy cheek, which she had to stand on tiptoe to reach, that both names meant *beloved*, and were the dearest in the world to her. Whereupon bluff Farmer Lee patted her brown hair, and declared that Ruth was the dearest name of all others to *him;* but as one little Ruth lay buried, the other should have her way, and so the blue-eyed infant, with many hopes and fears, was baptized Vida Lee.

On this particular evening supper was much later than usual, for it was the last day of haying, a matter of no little importance in the quiet routine of farm-life. David Lee had determined to finish that day, and confidentially informed his pretty helpmate at dinner "that all hands

would work till moonrise, but that the last load should be safe in the barn," winding up his decision with a cheery — "So, my wife, you must get along without Thad, for once."

The obliging wife assured David that she would willingly do so, and that is how Hetty was forced to bring up the cows and milk without the assistance of the boy designated rather vaguely by Mr. Lee as "Thad."

While Mrs. Lee tripped to and fro, loading the table with all sorts of good things to appease the substantial appetites of those awaiting its wholesome plenty, the last huge load came slowly through the dusk, the odorous hay almost hiding the big brown oxen, whose wearily drooping heads and dragging steps told that they had had an unusually busy day. The just rising harvest-moon shone calmly down on the tired men and cattle, lighting up the dew-wet grass, through which millions of fireflies glowed and sparkled like tiny stars in an emerald sky. Behind the cart came Farmer Lee, in shirt-sleeves and broad-brimmed straw hat, carrying a rake and pitchfork on his shoulder, and in his hand the large stone water-jug.

"Baker!" he called lustily to one of the hands in advance of the rest, "you had better get the steers up right away; the unruly brutes will be in the corn before morning. Put them in the barn-yard, and then come to supper. I guess Thad can get in the load alone." So saying, David vaulted over the garden fence, and made for the kitchen.

Baker promptly started after the unruly steers, and the youthful Thad, who was driving the brown oxen, made for the barn, whose wide doors stood open, waiting to receive the last load into its already full bosom.

The boy walked thoughtfully beside the cattle, meditatively chewing the stem of a fragrant red clover, until the wide horns of the oxen were almost entering the barn door, when he quickened his pace, and shouted encouragingly,

"Come on, Bright! haw up, gee! come along in with it!" by voice and gesture urging the obedient cattle to their utmost. The strong animals meekly responded to his rapid words, and pulled with all their great strength. In a moment they were standing quietly in the middle of the barn floor, their puffing breath and heaving sides telling plainly that they had done their very best. Thad dropped his whip, and in a second the little fingers had detached the heavy cart tongue. No sooner did it strike the floor than both oxen started for the yard. The lad quickly followed, removed the encumbering yoke, and turned their willing heads in the direction of the south pasture. Then he made all haste to the kitchen pump. After refreshing himself by a vigorous wash, he leisurely proceeded to brush the hay-seeds from his thick auburn hair, and don a slimpsy linen coat, when he was ready for supper. Despite that the boy looked tired and heated, his face possessed a sort of grave beauty that made one forget the coarse, unbleached cotton shirt, stained by grass-cutting and perspiration into a many-colored garment, the collarless neck, and ungainly shoes. Although he was very hungry, the lad stopped to kiss baby Vida, who, now wide awake, was industriously staring at the candle flickering on the mantel. After setting her little ladyship bolt upright in her cradle, and securing her ease and safety by propping her up with as many pillows as he could find, he passed on to the supper awaiting in the kitchen.

After supper, Thad sat down in his old place on the front-door steps, and, resting his elbows on his knees, looked absently out into the night. He was a mere boy in years, scarcely thirteen, possessing a thoughtful mind and a severe, reserved manner, in strange contrast with his boyish appearance, that always impressed one with the idea that he was different from other children of his age.

Sitting there in the doorway, with his dew-moistened

locks pushed back from the sunburned brow, and his face still with inward thought, a lover of phrenology would have said that the finely developed head of Thaddeus Ruggles, Farmer Lee's bound-boy, contained a brain of rare promise, and the ability to do great things when the boy became a man, and the world before him, in which to win a place. Forensic genius was stamped on the high, open forehead. Oratorical power slumbered in the full auburn brown eyes, and the calm, unsmiling mouth seemed formed to utter the gravest truths. Vain flight of fancy! for Thaddeus Ruggles was the son of a drunkard, born amid vice and poverty so deep that it still lingered a bitter memory in his young soul. The grand intellect, destined of heaven for great and noble purposes, was cradled in rags. The first cry of the richly gifted babe wailed out amid the cheerless gloom of a stormy winter's night. The morning found a helpless infant and a dead mother in the Ruggles shanty. The poor-house received the child, and the earth took to its frozen bosom the starved, heart-broken mother. Two years later, the wretched father died the drunkard's horrible death, and little Thad, the pet of the poor-house, was indeed an orphan.

One day, while passing the alms-house, David Lee chanced to catch a glimpse of the child's grave face, peeping through the wide slats of the gate that marked the poor-house grounds. The bright, intelligent features pleased him, and he said mentally, "He is a smart little chap, whosever child he is. I vow I'll take him home to Ruth. Her heart aches for the boy she buried two months ago; so I'll take her this little castaway. Women of her nature find comfort in such things."

To think was to act, with Mr. Lee. Accordingly he hitched his bay roadsters, and, in his energetic way, made his desire known to the superintendent of the institution, who readily agreed to his proposals. A few old paupers

whimpered dismally when they found that little Thad was going away forever, and kissed him with their withered lips, and wrinkled cheeks wet with their sorrowing tears; for the child had been cared for by the old hands that tried to bless and caress him in palsied trembling ere he went from among them to a harder home, perhaps, and a colder care. No one paid any heed to their grief, however, and in twenty minutes the necessary papers were made out, and little Thad Ruggles, then only five years old, was lawfully bound to David Lee until he was twenty-one.

Mrs. Lee kindly welcomed the motherless child of the poor-house, who would sit at her feet while she sewed, with his large, reddish-brown eyes intent on her face, for hours at a time, without changing his attitude or speaking a word —so still and mute that his child-gaze became strangely painful to Ruth, who would throw aside her work and take him in her lap just to see if the earnest mouth would smile back a reward for the kiss she gave it. But in vain her caresses. Before its birth the child's nature had been baptized in its mother's grief and tears. She had sobbed out her life trying to shield this grave-faced boy from the cold that was chilling her heart's blood. From his dead mother Thad had inherited his soft auburn hair and eyes, as well as that habitual look of sadness which gave Ruth such disquiet, and made her wish that he would laugh and shout like other little boys of his age.

Thaddeus never cared for play, and accepted work, when he was old enough to be of use, as a necessity that could not be avoided. He was always willing to do anything required of him, cheerful and even in temper. Seldom angry, never gay, but always thoughtful, he plodded through the many tasks set for him unmurmuringly, content that his hands should labor, though his mind was perpetually wandering after that which the farm could not give.

Thaddeus worked hard, as all the Lee household did.

Ruth was a kind mother to him, and his food and clothing were as good as that of his indulgent master. Mr. Lee sent him to school each winter, and generously provided him with books, that he might acquire a good education, thus in a measure fitting him for a useful life.

Thaddeus, recalling the bitter memory of his lowly birth and the miserable degradation of his poor-house existence, would find his eyes filling with grateful tears when contrasting the past with the present. He often reproached himself for lack of enthusiasm regarding his master's cherished farm plans, and once shyly intimated as much to Mr. Lee. But the farmer only laughed, and said, good-naturedly, "Stick to your books, Thad, my boy; I see your mind runs that way. Dig all you can out of sheepskin, and I'll grub in the soil." Thad did stick to his books, and studied until the thoughtful eyes grew still more thoughtful, and the serious mouth more silent in its earnestness.

CHAPTER II.

WHO WAS SHE?

FOR more than an hour Thad had been sitting motionless on the door-stone, and might have sat there all night had not Ruth's gentle voice interrupted his musings.

"Come, Thad, you have worked very hard to-day, and the nights are short. Go to bed now and rest, for it will soon be to-morrow."

"Yes, mother," (he always called the little woman mother;) and, instantly rising, he turned to go, but paused on hearing the latch of the garden gate rise and fall as if a weak hand had tried in vain to open it. Rove, the great lumbering Newfoundland, sleeping near by in the grass, caught the faint sound, and lifted his head with a low, warning growl.

"Did you not hear the latch lift, Thad?" asked Mrs. Lee, peering out in the moonlight. "Hettie is in the kitchen, and father's been in bed an hour, so it can't be either of them. It is so dark under the maples that one can't see anything, if anything were there."

"I thought I heard some one at the gate, but I guess I was mistaken," replied Thad. But, as he spoke, again came the faint click of the latch, this time followed by a low groan. Rove started up with a furious bark, and made a dash for the gate. "Hush, Rove!" commanded Thad, as he flew after him. In a moment the boy was heard crying hurriedly:

"Oh, mother, come quick! It is a woman, and she has fainted — dead, perhaps. Oh, *do* come quick and help her!"

Mrs. Lee instantly obeyed the excited voice, and was

soon beside the prostrate woman, vigorously chafing the cold hands and white temples of the stranger, and giving vent to softly uttered words of pity.

"Poor, young thing! what a miserable plight to be in. See, she has dropped her bundle — put it under her head, Thad, and then run for Hetty. She must be got into the house as soon as possible."

Thad caught up the bundle as directed, but came near letting it fall again, so great was his astonishment on feeling something stir within.

"Bundle!" he cried, in amazement; "do you call this a bundle? Why, mother, it 's *alive;* I can feel it kick; it 's a baby — a warm, breathing baby."

"Oh, goodness!" gasped little Ruth, all in a flutter, snatching the kicking bundle from the wondering Thad with feminine dexterity.

"A baby! Bless me, so it is! Oh, dear, dear — call Hetty. We must not let the poor, senseless mother die out here in the night."

Thad rushed to the kitchen, and nearly frightened placid Hetty out of her wits by blurting out in a breathless manner:

"There is a woman with a baby, lying dead — I guess she is dead — at the gate."

Hetty, shocked beyond words, and forgetful of her cooling dish-water, threw her apron over her head and ran to the aid of her mistress.

"Mercy!" she cried, bending compassionately over the motionless figure, and placing her hard hand on the seemingly pulseless breast. "Mercy on us! Who is she? She don't belong in these parts, that 's certain. Who in the world *can* she be? Deary me, how white her face is! Thank heaven, her heart beats yet. I reckon, Mrs. Lee, she has only fainted. Tired out, and famished beside — *that's* what ails her. Bread and butter will bring her around all right."

"I hope so," returned Ruth, tearfully. "But God help us, it is a pitiful sight."

Ah, yes; it was a pitiful sight! Heaven's summer stars never looked down on a sadder picture than that of the woman who lay rigidly still and white as marble under the maples. Her long, bright hair, trailing over the damp grass, mingled its fairness with the dust of earth before it had known the touch of death. Fitful rays of moonlight flickered through the thick leaves and lit up the poor, pale, pinched face, with its closed eyes and chill brow, ghastly white in its stillness.

"Oh, God help her!" sighed Mrs. Lee, as Thaddeus and Hetty lifted the frail form and silently bore her along the grassy garden path to the house, Ruth following with the child sound asleep in her motherly arms. Carefully depositing it in Vida's cradle, she turned to assist in placing the stranger on the green-covered sitting-room lounge, when every means was employed to restore the poor creature to consciousness. At last their efforts were successful, and she slowly opened a pair of mournful gray eyes in blank bewilderment at the trio of strange faces bending pityingly above her.

"Who are you all?" she asked, striving to sit up.

"We are friends," answered Ruth, gently; "and you are safe from the night dews. But you look ill; have you travelled far?"

"I am very weary, and have travelled a long, long way, and I—I—" The poor thing hesitated and turned away her head. But thought of the fountain that was perishing for want of bodily sustenance encouraged her to speak, and for her child's sake she conquered her rising pride, and added, in a pitiful whisper, "And I am *very* hungry."

Thad waited to hear no more, but bounded for the pantry as if life depended on his reaching it in a second. Hetty anxiously called after him:

"I guess you will find the tea hot yet, Thad; I left the pot on the stove, and the fire ain't out."

Thaddeus soon returned with food enough to satisfy the appetite of a dozen hungry women. The tea proved passably hot, and the famished stranger swallowed a cupful at a single draught. She had fasted for two days, and ate like one starving.

Suddenly she dropped the empty cup and sprang to her feet. Clasping her hands in a spasm of anguish, she cried wildly, "Oh, my baby; where is my baby? Oh! God, I have lost my child! I must find my child!" Frantic with this new grief, she was about to rush out in search of her lost infant, when Hetty stopped her by taking her by the arm and pointing toward the cradle.

"Don't distress yourself; the baby is all right, and sleeping like a top."

In the general excitement the little one had been forgotten, but now everybody seemed bent on giving it the utmost attention; and the three females simultaneously made a grasp at the softly breathing and heretofore neglected bundle stowed away in the cradle.

Mrs. Lee got the start, and succeeded in holding entire possession of the unconscious infant. Tired and exhausted, the mother sank back on the sofa, with the great, thankful tears silently dropping through her fingers, content to rest now that her child was safe.

Hetty stood near in breathless expectation, while her mistress removed the baby's wrappings, revealing the black-ringleted head of a mite of a baby, apparently some six months old. The blackest eyes ever seen quickly opened, shining like two stars from beneath their dark, heavily fringed lids.

"Oh, what a baby!" exclaimed Thad, starting back in surprise. "Such eyes for an atom like that! Why, I can

cover its whole face with the palm of my hand. It's all hair and eyes; just look at them twinkle."

"And they snapped open as bright as diamonds, without a drowsy look in them," added Hetty, admiringly. "So big and black and solemn! I never before saw so odd and knowing an expression in a baby's eyes; and then that head of curls might belong to a girl of five."

"Yes; but it's a singularly lovely child, withal," said Ruth, stooping to kiss its red, smiling mouth. The little lips curled angrily at the light touch, and a frown gathered on the tiny brow. Kicking out a rebellious foot, and tossing up her little doubled fists, she gave vent to a very decided cry of displeasure. Baby had no mind to be criticised so freely, waif though she was, and with all her power of lungs resented the indignity put upon her helplessness.

In vain Mrs. Lee essayed to soothe the vigorously protesting atom in her lap. She only yelled the harder.

"Give her to me," said a weak voice from the sofa; and Ruth gladly handed over her spunky little charge.

The moment the gypsy head found itself pillowed on the mother's bosom a profound silence ensued, and the sparkling black eyes shone victoriously on the assembled group of would-be soothers.

"Will you keep us to-night?" went on the weak voice, tremulous with emotion. "For this innocent babe's sake, I cannot die in the street. I am a stranger in a strange land, poor and friendless. You look kind and good. Have pity on the unfortunate, and give us shelter from the night."

"Certainly," replied Ruth. "We never turn away even the undeserving needy who come to our door, much less a mother with a helpless infant in her arms. Your face bears the sad impress of sorrow and tears, but you look like one

who has kept God in the midst of great trouble, and a woman's purity in the face of much suffering."

Hetty wiped a tear from her eye, and, glancing from the ringless finger of the stranger to the dark head of the elf-like child, sighed doubtingly.

The woman caught the doubting glance of Hetty's honest eyes, and, looking down at the small lineaments resting in her lap, said, in an explanatory tone:

"She resembles her father—just his hair and eyes and look." Again the ready tears came stealing down the pale cheeks, but she hastily put up a trembling hand to wipe them away, for the hot drops falling on baby's little face made her angry, and sudden ominous kicks warned the sad mother to desist a further baptism of tears. Evidently the child's father recalled bitter memories of the past—memories that had blighted this sorrowful, gray-eyed woman's life in its spring-time, and left her a wanderer, without home or kindred. Something of the kind was doubtless passing through Hetty's active mind, for she thought:

"Some handsome scamp has been the poor thing's ruin, and this witch of a baby is all his deceitful love was worth. His eyes and hair and *that* look cost *her* everything, and him—*nothing*."

In the midst of Hetty's kindling wrath a new auditor appeared on the scene. No less a personage than the master of the house, in a decidedly scant night-toilet, and wearing an exceedingly surprised expression on his ruddy phiz.

"What in the world are you all up so late for?" he inquired, modestly holding the bed-room door as close as he possibly could, with half his inquiring head thrust through the aperture. "Come, Ruth," he continued, somewhat impatiently. "Come, wife; Davie" (he had fallen into the habit of calling little Vida *Davie*) "is squirming

like an eel, and, Lord knows, *I* am tired enough without— Good heavens! what does this mean?" cried the master, thrusting his head through the partially open door, regardless of the briefness of his garments, on beholding the extraordinary company seated in his sitting-room at that unseemly hour.

Thad was standing dejectedly by the mantel, while Hetty sat bolt upright, with her arms severely folded, in the grimmest of silence. She had settled it in her own mind relative to the "handsome scamp," and was not to be easily softened. Little Ruth sat swaying gently to and fro in the low rocker, quite unconscious of the soothing motion, but looking the picture of sympathetic sorrow. And there on the lounge reclined the drooping stranger, shading her face with a hand as white as a lily, and an elfish infant slumbering in her lap. Good David Lee saw all this at a glance; but, as he could not divine what the unusual excitement meant, he called out in some little consternation:

"I say, wife, what's the row?"

Mrs. Lee hastened to explain, which she did in a few words.

"Oh, well!" said the matter-of-fact David, "put the poor creature to bed; that's the best thing, and get the house quiet as soon as you can. Thad is tuckered out, and so am I. Stow 'em away, Ruthie, and we'll talk about it to-morrow."

Mrs. Lee immediately acted on this sensible advice, and directed Hetty to lead the way to the east bedroom. Hetty promptly obeyed, and, candle in hand, gingerly mounted the stairs, followed by the tottering stranger, whom she every moment, notwithstanding the "handsome scamp," turned back to assist.

The time-honored east bedroom was a neat little chamber adjoining the indignant Miss Hetty's. The floor was

covered by a comfortable rag carpet of many hues. A good old-fashioned bedstead stood majestically in one corner, the high carved posts reaching nearly to the ceiling. A variegated patchwork quilt adorned the plump bed, folded back, so as to display the snow-white sheets to the best advantage. The daintily ruffled pillow-cases told of Ruth's industrious fingers as plainly as the glossily starched valenciennes did Hetty's skill in doing up "fine things." A couple of wooden chairs, a dwarfed deal bureau, and a small gilt-framed looking-glass, together with a highly colored wood-cut, representing the youthful Washington, with the stereotyped hatchet and hacked cherry-tree, in the act of being reprimanded by his angry papa, completed the furniture of the east chamber. The stranger entered this quaint room as if it were a holy temple wherein she was to be sanctified. Her wan face startled Hetty as she turned its haggard outline toward the moonlight streaming in at the open window; but the door suddenly shut between them, and the outpouring gratitude of that stricken heart only God saw. It was too sacred for mortal eyes, and Hetty, standing alone in the passage, felt that the gray-eyed woman would never leave the Lee homestead.

Thaddeus, filled too with the vague thought that the old life had vanished with the coming of the stranger and her weird-eyed child to the farm, mounted to his little dormitory under the roof, where he had lain so often and listened to the rain pattering on the shingles and dripping from the eaves, with a half-defined pang of jealous doubt that Davie, the idol of his boy affections, was being wronged or in some way injured by the elf-baby slumbering in the east bedroom.

In fifteen minutes the house was still and dark; no sound broke the quiet, save the ticking of the old-fashioned kitchen-clock and the soft sighing of the wind through the maples.

Peacefully Mrs. Lee slumbered beside her snoring spouse, with her baby snuggled close to her heart; for she was not the kind of mother to tuck her little one away in a crib. Ruth thought it so pleasant to wake up in the silent night, and feel Davie's soft, tiny hand on her breast, and the baby's breath, sweet as a rose-leaf, fluttering warm and regular against her heart. In the east bedroom the forlorn stranger at last fell asleep with *her* baby in her arms, and her sad life one day nearer its God. How wide a difference between these two mothers! yet each slept with a beautiful babe nestled lovingly to her life-giving bosom, unconscious of all that in the future was to blend those two little lives together for good or ill. The moon waned past midnight, and while the stars paled in the mellow sky, Imogene, the weirdly beautiful child of destiny, in sweet slumber closed her wondrous eyes for the first time beneath the roof of the old Lee homestead.

CHAPTER III.

THE MYSTERY REMAINS A MYSTERY.

THE next morning found the strange lady too ill to rise, and for many weeks she lay very near the borders of the spirit-land. It was the first of October when she began to recover sufficiently to admit of conversation, and during all this time she had been tenderly cared for by the Lees, who were entirely ignorant as to who she was, or from whence she came. Her very name was a mystery which no one could reveal. She was, by birth and education, evidently a lady, and possessed a fair English face, and a slender form, much too fragile for the sorrowful wanderings that had cast her, ill and fainting, at a stranger's door. The cool autumn days appeared to restore her wonted strength, and under Mrs. Lee's untiring care she rapidly became convalescent. Of course, good little Ruth, being but a woman, had her share of feminine curiosity, and was longing for an explanation, although she scrupulously refrained from intimating as much to the invalid, hoping that, with returning health, the pale lips would speak without being questioned. And Ruth was right, for one day she was startled by the strange lady laying a thin hand on her own. The weak white fingers caressed the plump brown ones of Ruth a moment, then the pale lips, in a sweet, low tone, began their story:

"Dear Mrs. Lee, have you no curiosity to know who the poor heart-broken creature is, on whom you have bestowed such heavenly charity? The desire would be both natural and right. Sit near me, just where I can see your kind eyes grow tender, and I will tell you something of myself. I had nearly lost faith in God's justice and earth's pity

when you took me in, and taught me how kind humanity can be to the sick and friendless." She paused to kiss the hand that she had scarcely strength to carry to her lips, and abruptly asked: "How long have I been ill? How long since I lay down under the maples, as I thought, to die!"

"You came to us on the 10th of August, and to-day is the 5th of October," said Ruth. "You have been ill — very ill, indeed; but you are going to get well and strong again; these delicious autumn breezes will set you up in no time."

"Perhaps," said the lady, doubtfully, pausing to look out of the window, as if to more vividly recall the sadness of that desolate night.

At this juncture, little Imogene, who had been soundly sleeping on the bed, stirred angrily, and by a loud cry insisted on having the daintily embroidered blanket that covered her restless little limbs instantly removed. Ruth hastened to obey the imperious summons, and took the rosily slumber-flushed baby in her arms.

"It has been so long since I have held her: let me take her a few moments," pleaded the mother.

Ruth complied, and she nestled her pallid cheek against the infant's black ringlets, and fondled the little form until the velvet black eyes closed again, and the small, nervous head lay still on her bosom. Holding the tiny snow-flake of a hand in her own waxen fingers, the mother resumed:

"I was born in England, of a good family; the youngest of three sisters. I received the best of education, and my youth and girlhood were full of sunshine. Three years ago, while travelling in France with a party of friends, I met a gentleman, and — and —" She hesitated, and looked down at the child in her lap, as if her mind was far away with the man who had wronged her past all but a woman's forgiveness.

Ruth shuddered, saying softly, "You met a gentleman in the sunny land of France, and — loved him."

"*Yes; dearly loved him.*"

Oh, the sorrow expressed in those four slowly uttered words. They told the story of that wan face so eloquently that Ruth cared to hear no more. The tears were silently rolling over the pale cheeks now, and lay glittering like diamond-drops amid her baby's black curls, so like those of the man she had so "dearly loved." She did not speak, but her trembling hand wandered lovingly over the child's moist brow down to the dimpled knees and warm white mites of feet, the little pink toes just peeping from the white dress like ten little rosebuds in a cluster.

"How dreadful!" said Ruth, stooping, with her brown eyes full of tears, to kiss the pink toes and sleeping mouth, as a sort of relief to her feelings. "You said, the night you came, that Genie looked like her father. He must have been very handsome, and, I fear, very wicked."

The English lady did not reply to the last remark, but, with her gaze still upon the child, said, tenderly: "Yes, Genie is the image of her father, whom I loved with my whole heart, and married in the full belief that his soul was as true and beautiful as his wondrous face was divinely handsome."

"*Married!*" Ruth breathed freer. Her companion looked up searchingly.

"Yes, Mrs. Lee; I would not have you think too hardly of me. I married him, and — and it brought me to *this*. He was rich, worldly, and I — well there is not much about me to win or keep the love of a man like *him*. Perhaps I was hasty, too quick in condemning — no matter, the past is beyond recall. Be silent as to what I have told you, and ask me no more. The story is too painful and recent; some time I may speak of it again, but not now. I *cannot* say anything unkindly of him with his child sleeping

against my heart. He never saw her but once, and then he kissed her and said she was every bit like him, and would grow up a splendid beauty, and that all Paris would be at her feet. Ah, my darling, she will never see France, much less reign a queen of beauty in its capital. And now, even to one so tender and generous as yourself, Mrs. Lee, I can say no more."

"And your name?" queried Ruth, awed by the sad, proud look settling like a shadow on the poor, white face lifted to hers in mute entreaty.

"You may call me Elinor Vale." The name was little more than a whisper, but Ruth caught its musical sound, and replied, with all her true womanly nature sparkling in her eyes:

"Well, Elinor Vale, you will accept a woman's sympathy in your sorrow, and the secret that is blanching your cheek and eating away your very life shall be sacred; for I know, in spite of the mystery surrounding your wifehood, that you have done no wrong. The sin or neglect of others may have destroyed your happiness, but never tainted your pure nature." Ruth's kind hand crept into that of Elinor, where it lingered a moment, and then fluttered up to the fair hair, as if asking a blessing on the sorrow-bowed head of the woman whom God had sent to her for love and protection.

A long pause ensued before Elinor went on, the same plaintive undertone in her voice:

"I came to America with a hope of finding what I had lost beyond the sea. A hope so strong and dear that it kept me up all the long, long way. But it left me, never to return, ere I had been a day in this great, strange land. Too late I found my journey fruitless. My slender stock of money was soon gone, and one by one I was forced to part with my jewels. Many of them were very dear; but my child must not die, so I disposed of everything that

would procure food — yes, everything but my wedding-ring: *that* I could not part with. I travelled for days seeking a situation as a country governess, or seamstress — anything that would give me food and shelter I would gladly have accepted, no matter how hard the toil; but no one listened to my prayer. Now, I know that it was a wild request; for what right had I, a poor, friendless woman, to ask the confidence of any one, who had no confidence to give in return; but I did, for it was the only hope left. In my misery I cared not where I wandered — all places were alike to me; and unconscious of whither I was going, I took the stage at a town called Egmont. Some one said that it was in the State of Ohio, but I knew nothing of the country, and, sick and exhausted, walked blindly on, praying all the way that for my child's sake heaven would grant me strength to reach some friendly roof. God in his mercy heard my poor prayer and sent me to your gate. I remember how heavy the latch seemed, and how many times I tried to lift it; and all the while the thoughtful boy-figure was sitting in the bright moonlight on the door-step, unmindful of my near wretchedness. Then comes the blank. You know the rest. God has restored my health, in part at least, and with that blessing comes the necessity to toil. I can sew and embroider well; thoroughly understand music and drawing; also French and German. Are there no wealthy families in the neighborhood to whom these accomplishments would be of value? I would teach everything necessary for a finished education, and ask only bread in return. Oh, dear Mrs. Lee, you will help me find work of this kind, for I know nothing of rougher toil?" Elinor was sobbing bitterly ere she had finished this pitiful plea for assistance, and Ruth's tears were falling too, but she managed to say, while wiping them away with the corner of her neat little apron, "Oh, don't think of work. Stay with us Elinor: the farm can well afford to support another.

Heaven has blessed us with humble plenty that we might share it with others who are less blest. Life here is quiet and full of content. No bitterness mingles with our joy; no wounding thorns lie hidden under our roses, ready to pierce the heart that loves them best. Stay with me, dear Elinor, and teach me the patience and humility born of sorrow."

"No, no," hastily interrupted Mrs. Vale; "God forbid! *You* were not born for sorrows such as mine. However kindly you may wish me to remain, I cannot consent to be a burden to any one. Although so lowly, I have some pride left yet, and must earn my own livelihood."

"Oh, don't talk of being a burden," said Ruth, in a hurt tone. "I need some one to sew — David has always said so. And then Vida ought to have more attention than I have time to bestow. If you are determined on obtaining a situation, why not accept it from me? I offer you a home and love, Elinor; can the wide world give you more, or can you pain me by refusing?" The little woman was getting eloquent in her earnestness, and, coming a little nearer, said, playfully:

"We are all workers here, and you shall not be an idler. Trust me for keeping you busy. Why, I have piles of sewing that must be done right away, and I was remarking as much to Hetty the other day," and Ruth energetically began enumerating the stock of unmade garments on hand, cleverly doing away with her companion's last faintly-put objection of dependence by adding a formidable number of sheets, pillow-cases, and towels, that *must* be made as soon as possible, winding up with the convincing remark: "It will be such a care off my hands to have a neat seamstress always in the house. Besides, you are just the company that I like, and will be such a comfort to me!"

Elinor glanced up eagerly. "Comfort! Oh, can I be a comfort to you, dear Mrs. Lee? If I could make your

happy life more happy, I would gladly remain. Give me something to do, and let me call you Ruth, as I would a dear sister, and in this quiet room, far away from all that has made life so bitter, perhaps I may learn to forget. I know my years are few, but oh! the joy of dying near one who will be a mother to my little girl." Overcome by emotion, Elinor's tears flowed anew, and she bent low to kiss Ruth's clasped hands, as she sat with the fading light shining on her sweet face. Her cheeks were wet, for the pitying heart of Ruth was deeply touched, and, bending forward, her lips met the pale brow of the stranger, who was henceforth to be no more a stranger, but her friend and companion until the fair, foreign face of Elinor Vale lay under the hillside daisies.

"Don't cry," pleaded Ruth, trying to look bright through her tears. "God's ways are best. I said so when he took my dear little babies from me. Look to Him, and trust the future for many pleasant hours. But, see, Genie is awake, the smiling, star-eyed tyrant! I'll take her below, and you lie down and rest. I fear you have been sitting up too long. I'll bring up your tea in an hour, if you are good and take a little nap first. Mind, I am nurse, and shall insist on strict obedience." And taking the "little tyrant" from its weary mother, Mrs. Lee softly closed the door and tripped lightly away. And Elinor, in the fulness of her heart's great gratitude, fell on her knees, and lifting her tear-wet face toward heaven, prayed that the best of God's gifts might be given to good Ruth Lee, and that He would spare the one fair little daughter to her love.

Not for herself, but for her, the noblest of women, did she pray. "My life is blasted past earth's comforting," she murmured. "I bow to the cross, and His will be done; but for this wife, mother, and friend I would crave my Father's greatest blessing."

From that hour Elinor cheerfully took up her new duties,

and the calm, pale English lady became a permanent inmate of David Lee's family.

Ruth carried Genie down stairs, and with many admonitions "to be good," she set her down beside her own baby. The little elf puckered her red bud of a mouth, and cooed in a warlike manner at her small blonde companion, but contented herself by making vain attempts to grasp the silken locks of timid, wondering Davie, who stared aghast at the usurping effrontery of her gypsy mate.

Occasionally Farmer Lee found time to give Elinor's child a passing caress; but shy, studious Thad Ruggles felt a singular coldness toward the innocent infant. He greatly respected and admired the pale, intellectual lady, who seldom left her room, but her child he unconsciously shut from his heart, and refused to give it the smallest portion of the love that overflowed for winsome Davie. He remorsefully thought of his own desolate babyhood, and tried to be just; but the dark beautiful child of Elinor remained an outcast from his affections.

CHAPTER IV.

LITTLE PHIL MAKES HIS BOW.

"BLESS me!" exclaimed Mrs. Lee, looking up from her sewing, as she sat by the window the day following her conversation with Elinor; "here comes Phil Shirley. It's well the babies are not asleep, for the young rogue would have them up in no time. As it is, I fear he will set them to fighting or crying before he has been in their presence a minute. Now, I remember, he has never seen Genie; I wonder what the little mischief will think of her?"

"I'm sure *I'll* not take the trouble to ask him, for I can't bear the mischievous scamp," snapped Hetty, wrathfully jerking off into the pantry with the tray of apples she was peeling. "That boy is the pest of the entire neighborhood. If there is a cat to be killed or a bird's nest to be robbed, you will find the little wretch on hand."

The recipient of Mehetable's ungracious encomiums, shrilly whistling, and throwing random stones at a pair of angry catbirds in the currant-bushes as he came along the garden path, at last leisurely swung himself into the presence of the ireful Hetty Smith, who muttered:

"I vow, I hate the boy; he is *such* a torment," and vigorously slammed to the pantry door, thus shutting out the unconscious object of her deep aversion.

As "that tormenting boy" is destined to be an important personage in our story, we will honor him, notwithstanding Miss Mehetable's well-grounded prejudice, with a chapter by himself.

Philip Shirley was the second son of a small farmer who resided about a mile from Mr. Lee, and was universally called the worst boy in the village. Some people went so

far as to say that he was the very worst boy that ever lived, and prophesied with the liveliest satisfaction that his end would be a well-deserved rope. At any rate, the young scapegrace was Alden's worst boy, a distinction that seemed to please him highly, for he took every opportunity of making the appellation good. Phil boasted of having whipped every boy of his size within ten miles of the village. He had thrashed two or three school-teachers, beside smashing the bedroom window of a vixenish old maid of the neighborhood, who had snappishly volunteered him a savage reproof on the evilness of his ways. Added to all this, he cut the minister's harness to strings when he came to officiate at his sister's marriage, and "egged" his would-be brother-in-law on the very eve of the wedding. Then he had stoned Dr. Humphrey's pet pigeons until half a dozen lay kicking on the roof of the barn, where they came every morning to dress their bright plumage and to coo in the early sunlight. He had lamed Deacon Hooper's best cow, and stolen the Widow Lake's choice pippins; had bobbed the tail of Gus Larcom's fast sorrel mare, and plugged the waste-pipes of the Hon. Lot Colburn's fountain so effectively that his cherished flower-beds were all afloat, and his sacred lawn no better than a marsh; and a score of similar pranks and depredations, all of which were unanimously laid at Master Phil's door. There was no end to his mischief at home or elsewhere; and thus convinced, his despairing father kindly gave everybody liberty to thrash him soundly if caught at his tricks; but the lad was sly, cautious, and nimble as an eel, and although scarcely eight years old, was, as Hetty had said, the avowed pest of the village.

This incorrigible Phil was a queer little chap to look at. Stunted in figure, with long, thin arms, short legs, and disproportionately broad-shouldered, Nature, as if to give the lie to that unpleasant prophecy of the final rope, refused to

give him a neck, but generously made amends by bestowing an enormous head, that seemed twice too large for his dwarfed little body. The phrenological developments of combativeness and destructiveness were inordinately large, and this wonderful head was round at the top, and looked as hard as a new bullet, characteristic of the warlike element that pervaded his fierce nature. Tough, wiry, and agile as a young Indian, cold or heat, storm or sunshine had little effect on him. Hard words and hard knocks he took and gave unflinchingly, as if that were what he came into the world for, and had no other mission to accomplish.

A crop of stiff, black hair, cut as short as possible, and of exact evenness, came to an abrupt point where it met the bold forehead, and, curving away from the temples, made the great brow still more prominent, beneath which a pair of sharp black eyes, deep set under heavy projecting brows, sparkled and darted in everlasting alertness and mischief.

The high cheek-bones, solid chin, and strong, thin-lipped mouth were far from imparting beauty to this singularly cast countenance, although the last somewhat gentle feature was the only thing that redeemed his face from a look of actual cruelty. But his smile was quick, brilliant, and strangely winning, transforming the hard, cross expression into one tender and fascinating, as rapidly as good nature followed his anger.

Phil, as usual, was primitively attired in a buttonless cotton shirt, torn at the sleeves and collar, and pants that had evidently seen many rough-and-tumble battles, ominously rent in the rear, broken at the knees, and frayed at the pockets. No hat was ever found big enough to fit his great head, and so Phil always carried that useful article of apparel in his hand, and seemed to value it for no other purpose than to catch butterflies, trap humble-bees, and thrash wasps' nests, which tended to keep it in a very airy and healthful condition. The boy was a strange amalga-

mation of the fierce and tender; capable of fighting or loving to the death; possessing the slumbering ambition of a Napoleon, and the invincible courage of a Trajan, mingled with as much superabundant, overflowing boy deviltry as could well be crammed in the pernicious composition of one small youth.

He was particularly fond of babies, especially so of the feminine portion of babydom. The girls always had a royal champion in dauntless little Phil. His ready sticks, stones, kicks, and cuffs had blackened the eye of many a bullying urchin, older by three good years than himself, for tormenting those same little girls into tears and dirty aprons. From these frequent and protracted fights, his scant garments were in perpetual tatters, to the infinite despair of his saving and tidy mother.

But Phil was not to blame. He was born belligerent, and pommelled those who opposed or assailed him with the entire force of his sturdy little body. It is true he was stubborn, self-willed, and fiery; possessing a terrible temper, anything like force or restraint aroused the tiger in him, and then his fury knew no bounds. Every boy in the village had experienced, by actual testing, these remarkable traits in Philip Shirley's pugnacious disposition, and thereby stood in respectful fear of his active fists. But love and gentle persuasion would subdue and conquer him in a moment, although no one, not even his mother, had ever thought of resorting to this easy and simple method of keeping his temper and mischief in check. Let a little child say, "Phil, I am so tired," and it was on his back in a second; or, "Phil, I've spilled all my dinner, and it's so long till afternoon," he would divide his last slice. And this was the lad who had excited Hetty's indignation, and alarmed Mrs. Lee as to the armistice of the infants.

Phil, after a farewell aim at the most noisy catbird, that laid it silent under the currant-bush, slid unceremo-

niously in at the open door, loitering nonchalently on the sill, not in the least disconcerted at Mrs. Lee's failure to bid him enter. Scratching his bare toes along a crack in the kitchen floor, to see how far he could go without getting off of it, he scraped over to the sitting-room, and took up the seam in the carpet as a substitute for the crack, slowly dragging himself toward the admiring babies. Relinquishing the seam, he dropped down between the two, and, with his elbows on his knees, silently gazed first on one and then the other, as if trying to solve what the far-off future might contain for them.

Lifting Imogene's little dark face in his small brown hands, (Phil owned the daintiest hands and feet in the world, despite the tan and scratches,) he burst out enthusiastically:

"By golly, ain't she a ripper?"

"Philip," gravely reproved Mrs. Lee, "you should not say such naughty words."

"Well, she *is a* jolly one," persisted Phil. "She ain't afraid of anything. If she was a boy, now, I bet she'd fight till she hadn't a rag on before she'd cave. You might pinch her blue, or pull her hair ever so hard, and she wouldn't whimper, not a piep, 'cause she's game."

To illustrate the truth of his remark, Phil slyly pulled the silken lock, a beautiful, tempting ringlet, just back of Genie's dainty ear. She proved "game," indeed, and worthy of his high encomiums, for she did not cry; but an angry blaze darted into the velvet black eyes, and with all her baby strength she threw the rattle, with which she had been peacefully playing when Master Phil made his *dêbut*, into his face.

Wild with sudden rage, he raised his hand to strike her in return — retaliation was the first impulse of his nature — but glancing down at the passionate mite scowling at him from the floor, he laughed, and contented himself by push-

ing her over. Baby did not cry at this new indignity, but lay passive as she fell, defiantly staring at him, without a wink or a sound.

Presently Phil repented, and magnanimously stooped to raise her up, when, quick as lightning, she caught him by the ear and twisted away vigorously. Phil yelled and shook her, but the little thing held on bravely, clinging all the harder for the shaking. In the midst of it Vida began to scream at the top of her lungs, which brought Mrs. Lee to the rescue. "I might have known better than to leave the room," she exclaimed, in self-reproof, deftly disengaging Genie's hand from her opponent's burning ear. No sooner was he free than he turned on the still screaming Vida.

"Oh, hush your yellin'! *You* ain't hurt, but you are *such* a precious white pimp. No game at all."

Mrs. Lee caught the little "white pimp" to her bosom, and Davie tucked her frightened little face under her mother's protecting arm, with the tears and scare and wonder still in her blue eyes. But Genie coolly tumbled over on the carpet, and fell to sucking the handle of her restored rattle as calmly as if she had not fought and conquered.

Ruth, after seeing the two babies properly righted, peremptorily led Master Phil out of the back door, and sternly bade him to run home. He went meekly enough to the threshold, but there he paused, and looking back over his shoulder, said, in a half whisper, "*Who is she?*"

"Who is who?" replied Ruth blankly, quite unable to understand to whom his inquiry referred.

"Why she, the little, dark tomtit there on the floor."

"You have treated her so badly I oughtn't to tell you. It's the poor, sick English lady's baby, and you should be ashamed to hurt her, a great boy like you — and she a baby that cannot even walk yet."

"But she can pull," rejoined Phil, passing his hand over his hot ear. "Yes, ma'am; she can pull, and scratch, and kick, and lick babies who can walk out of their boots in two minutes. Oh, but she's goin' to make a jolly fighter, 'cause it's in her eye. Thad told me you had a strange girl baby here, and I came in to see it. *No, ma'am,* Miss Lee, I'd not hurt her for anything. I *never* fight little 'uns, only plague 'em. I never fight under my size. *No, ma'am,* I don't." Phil squared his funny little figure, and twisted his apology of a neck in a manner meant to be very convincing. He was silent a moment, standing with one foot on the sill and the other swinging in the air, as if reviewing the code of honorable pugilistic warfare before going on with his inquiries.

Ruth was anxious to get rid of him as easily as possible, and, with Davie on one arm and her sewing hanging from the other, she pacifically urged his departure.

"Come, come, Phil, run home, now; that's a good boy. The children will be in better nature some other day, perhaps, and then you can make them another visit."

Phil looked up in her gentle face, with his own wearing its wondrous beautifying smile, that Mrs. Lee could not help patting kindly his close-cropped head; and through all the changes of his changeful life Philip Shirley never forgot that gentle touch. His voice took a new note of sweetness, when he said:

"I'm going, Miss Lee; for there's lots of bumble-bees on the thistles; but what's her name?" with another backward look at Genie.

"Imogene Vale."

"Imogene; it's tame; I don't at all like it," said the boy, contemptuously. "I shall call her Gypsy Vale; for she *is* a regular out-and-out gypsy." And taking up his whistle just where he had left off when stoning the catbirds, he departed as leisurely as he came.

Phil did not mind being sent off — he was used to it; but slipped down through the beet and onion beds, back of the pea-vines, until he came to the garden fence, where, snugly ensconced under a great gooseberry-bush, he discovered an old hen patiently incubating thirteen eggs. Of course, being Phil Shirley, "that worst boy," he pulled her summarily from the nest, clapped his hat over her to stop her "bloody squeaking," as he termed a setting hen's natural notes of alarm, and for fifteen minutes after quietly amused himself by diligently puncturing, one by one, the warm eggs, with a very crooked pin, which was doing duty as a button somewhere in the suspender-region of his dilapidated raiment. It is needless to say that those thirteen eggs did not hatch, much to the maternal anguish of the hen, and the unspeakable surprise of Hetty, who declared it was the strangest thing she ever heard of.

Carefully replacing the crooked pin, after a vain attempt to straighten it by bending it back and forth between his teeth, he liberated the old hen, who was so nearly smothered that she could not squeak. Indeed, the poor effort of ruffling her draggled feathers was too much, and she pitched over on her bill, incapable of even the ghost of a cluck. He watched her creep off among the parsnips and cabbages, apparently bent on going direct to Hetty for sympathy and redress. After this exploit, Phil wandered on through the currant-bushes and garden blackberry-vines till he came to a dozen beehives, one of which he daringly overturned, and then skulked away through the white clover to escape the infuriated bees swarming angrily in the air. In the short hour he devoted to Mrs. Lee and her affairs Phil had contrived to do a good deal of mischief; but in that time he had met Imogene, the baby girl, who was destined to rule his remarkable life. This was the beginning, but the end was — *where?*

CHAPTER V.

PHIL APPEARS IN A NEW CHARACTER.

FIVE years went by, and never since that day had the English lady alluded to the mystery surrounding her life. "Who was she?" was still a question unanswered, and she alone who could elucidate the matter remained mute. Again the autumn leaves were dying, and fair Elinor was fading with them. All summer the hectic bloom had deepened on her hollow cheeks; the sad gray eyes, more wondrous bright, grew large and vacant day by day, and the poor emaciated hands too feeble to lift the little girl, who would stand at her knee with her great solemn black eyes uplifted, as if trying to read the mystic sign written on her mother's thin features. She was used to the racking cough and tremulous step; but, poor child, she did not know that they were sure heralds of the insidious disease that was so soon to write her motherless. The child's whole passionate, wayward heart went out to this frail mother in a perfect wildness of love. The haughty little creature, headstrong, perverse, and tyrannical, was at times almost unmanageable, and acknowledged no rule save that of her dying mother. There Imogene's affections were true and deep and reverencing. Already the whispered mystery of her presence in the Lee family seemed to be strongly impressed on her young mind. Intuitively she appeared to realize that she had a sneering world to fight, and boldly turned toward it her beautiful face, bidding it defiance even in her babyhood. Daily the strong intellect and imperious will developed, unchecked by either Davie's gentle companionship or Mrs. Lee's meek counsel, and, though little more than five years old, the child queened it

over timid Vida, mild Ruth, and good-natured David, right royally, and returned the silent dislike of Thaddeus with open scorn. Young Ruggles, now a tall, slight stripling of eighteen, with the old instinctive spirit of jealousy still predominant in the inmost recess of his heart, felt keenly that Mrs. Lee's blonde little daughter shrank to nothing beside the brilliant, beautiful Imogene. *He* never liked her proud, foreign face, with its midnight eyes and curling cloud of purple black hair; but he knew that the world would freely give to her the admiration and love which the gentler nature could never hope to gain. But everybody knew that a great sorrow was stealthily coming to the child, and so everybody, even Thaddeus, pitied her, and allowed Imogene her way.

Next to her mother, that strange embodiment of good and evil, Phil Shirley, was her idol. She liked his daring and mischief immensely, and was never loath to lend a helping hand when necessary. It was no unusual occurrence for them to indulge in private battles of their own; but they were sure to make up again in an hour, as good friends as before. Genie often spoke of him to her mother, who had scarcely seen him twice in the five years she had been in Alden. Elinor lived almost entirely in the east bedroom, apart from the bustle and hurry of the work-day world. Her little daughter's prattling school-talk of Phil and his doings, however, were always listened to with interest, and in the end created an intense desire in her heart to see him. She said nothing of this wish to the child, who, in her impetuous way, would have instantly rushed off in search of her uncouth playmate, delighted at her mother wanting to see one whom she thought "just the best worst boy that ever lived." Mrs. Vale kept the longing to herself until it became very difficult for her to walk from the bed to the easy-chair by the window, and then she all of a sudden surprised Mrs. Lee, by asking to see

the generally tabooed Phil Shirley. "Genie talks so much about him," apologized the invalid, as if it was necessary to make an excuse for wishing to see so rude a visitor. Ruth, though somewhat astonished, perceived that Elinor was in earnest, and as she happened to see Phil that afternoon, she without hesitation sent him up to the sick-chamber, not, however, until she had given him many injunctions "to be a good boy, and remember his manners, for the lady was sick, and would never be well again." Thus enjoined, Phil considered it a very solemn affair, and as a prelude to "remembering his manners," threw his hat, which might have been that identical butterfly-catcher of five years ago, into the corner back of the chamber-door, and slowly mounted the stairs, counting each step as he ascended, not at all anxious to enter Elinor's presence. He had a boy's horror of meeting a white, consumptive face, with only a week of life in it; and then, too, he recollected how he had heard some one say that "Miss Vale was nothing but a breathing skeleton." Very lightly he stepped to the door, and the faint "Come in" that answered his low knock was very promptly responded to. Once inside, he pushed it shut with his back, and all of a sudden fell to admiring the red stripes of the neatly woven rag carpet.

Elinor glanced up and held out her hand. Phil hesitated, as if afraid to touch such a poor, white, lifeless thing, and again took refuge in admiring the red stripes. After a moment he conquered the weakness, and resolutely laid his warm, healthy hand in Elinor's blue-vained palm. He was not sorry, however, when she withdrew it; but he was a good deal amazed when she put her arm about him, as he stood beside her chair, and bent her still fair face, tinted all over, except the white brow, with the stealthy death-rose, and kissed him two or three times, not quick and anxiously, but slow and lingeringly, as if uttering a bless-

ing between each caress. Phil forgot how very near the grave poor Elinor stood, and dropped his head against her arm — ah, upon her breast — for he was on his knees beside her now, and crying like a broken-hearted child. Ruth's kindly touch might roll back to him a vague dream of the past, but Elinor's kiss was eternal. The future might steep him in guilt to the very lips; but the spot *her* lips kissed, pure in his heart that day, would ever remain holy! His tears wet the lace ruffle at her throat, but she did not check the flow, knowing that the tide would go back to its source and leave the stream undisturbed. For a quarter of an hour she sat with her arm about him and his head upon her bosom; then the boy's restless black eyes went up to her face. His heart gave a great bound of hope — she was not going to die! She was not so very thin, and then her eyes were as bright as twilight stars, and her bloom as vivid as a girl's. What made people say that she was so sick — so *very* sick? Phil did not believe it; and just as soon as he could steady his voice, he determined to offer a remedy which he felt thoroughly convinced would restore Elinor to perfect health. While he was considering about this infallible prescription, Elinor interrupted his reflections by asking:

"The villagers call you a strange boy, don't they, Philip?"

"A *bad* boy," corrected Phil, promptly. "One of the very worst."

"Oh, yes; but people are often mistaken," replied the invalid, lightly passing her fingers over the great brow and bristling black hair, cut short as ever, and without a part. "You may be Alden's worst boy, but I somehow feel, Philip, that you will also be its most famous man. Thaddeus Ruggles possesses a genius to *win* men — you a power to *bend* them; he might become the star of thousands, you the glory of millions; but let ambitious dreams pass.

Keep the heart of your boyhood, and life will work out its own destiny. Genie often tells me how good and brave you are in her behalf. Are you fond of my little girl, Philip?"

"Fond of Gypsy? I guess I am. Why, I thrash everybody who is cross to her. Not the girls, you know; but I whack their brothers, and that makes it even, and it pleases Gypsy just as well."

A flickering smile played on Elinor's lips at this frankly confessed devotion to her daughter, and half unconsciously she laid her cheek against the little bronze-like hand resting on the back of her chair. He looked so strong, and so capable of protecting a girl's rights, that she fell to reverencing those very qualities that all Alden were strenuously condemning. Phil, unused to such womanly caressing — most women would as soon have thought of fondling a chestnut-burr — stood wonderingly passive, touched to the bottom of his brave, burly heart. Her color and strength were visibly failing with the unwonted excitement; and when she spoke again, Phil started, so changed was her face and voice.

"Philip," she said, struggling to suppress a rising cough, "poor Gypsy will soon be all alone. Always be kind to her, for she is a little thing to fight the world, without father or mother or kindred to love and care for her." At mention of Genie, Phil was his old impetuous self, and ready for combat, protest, or promise.

"Yes, I'll always be kind to Gypsy. Indeed, ma'am, she'll never lack a friend while *I* live; but it ain't dying you mean. Oh! don't think of that, for I know of something that will cure you. It's a sirup. Mother makes it. It's got balsam, and comfrey, and spigment, and rascafarilla, and lots of suchlike in it. Some of 'em you have to pull, and some of 'em you have to dig; but I can get 'em all, and they'll cure your cough in just no time at all. I'll go right off, and get the balsam. Some calls it life ever-

lasting; it grows everywhere in the pastures; it 's the main thing in the sirup, and there ain't no cough that can stand it."

Phil's eagerness was so great to be off after these miraculous roots and herbs that Elinor hardly knew how to find words or strength to restrain him.

"No, no, Philip, my child; nothing can help me now. In a few weeks, days, perhaps, I shall be gone; then I would have you remember that you promised to be kind to Genie; that her dead mother wished it, and that she kissed and blessed you in tenderest love only a little time before death chilled the fountain of tenderness. I so wanted to bid you good-by, and now it 's over." Again she kissed him, and the touch was sadder than tears. Like one in a dream, the boy departed, glancing cautiously back, as if he expected the pale sufferer to spread a pair of white wings, and float away to heaven without the pain of further dying.

Left alone, Elinor closed her eyes and murmured:

"He is fond of Genie, and she is fond of him. Ah! strange, passing strange, that those two vastly different natures should so wonderfully assimilate. God keep them; for they are full of earth's passions. Pride and ambition kill love sometimes; they killed *me*. Oh, God, in pity watch over them, and save them from their own heart-fierceness!"

Ruth came in to find her fearfully exhausted, and unable to rise. For the last time she was assisted to the white pillows, and the easy-chair by the window never received her frail form again.

CHAPTER VI.

UNDER THE DAISIES.

ONE peaceful afternoon, when the October sun was sinking toward the west, Elinor begged them to put aside the curtain, that she might see the brown harvest lots flooded once more by the warm autumn sunlight. For more than a week she had lain there on the high-testered bed, a white shadow awaiting the angel that should fan out the fluttering flame and bear away the tired spirit to the land of the blessed.

They knew it was her last sunset, and Ruth had hoped that for Imogene's sake she would speak; but the precious hours were swiftly passing, and still she was dumb.

Mrs. Lee looped back the white muslin curtains with that dull, numb feeling that one experiences when long-looked-for dissolution is close at hand. Occasionally a yellow leaf from the maples shivered down, drifting against the window-sills in its slow descent. Elinor noticed the melancholy dropping of the leaves by a softly uttered "Dying, everything is dying!"

After a little while she asked:

"Are we alone, dear Ruth?"

"All alone," replied Ruth, coming to the bedside and rearranging the pillows. Elinor caught the softly active hand patting about on the bedclothes, and, lifting her fading eyes, said sweetly:

"Ruthie dear, I am dying. I shall never see another sunset. It will rise to-morrow in full glory, but I shall lay here shrouded and mute. You have made my journey to heaven pleasant and peaceful. Oh! Ruth, dear, dear friend, *have* I been ungrateful in keeping you ignorant of *all* my

past? Oh! poor, pitiful pride! I shrink from telling it even now, when shivering in death's cold grasp. But I must, for it is a sacred trust I give you in keeping for my daughter. Oh! Ruth, you will care for my child? Guard her wayward youth as tenderly as I would have done had God spared me to her. Oh! watch over and pray for her, Ruth; pray with a mother's love in your heart, and I will guard from heaven. When she is in the shadows, stand beside her. Never, *never* desert her, no matter what the woe. You will promise, Ruth?"

"I accept the trust, and, as God sees me, your child shall ever be as my own," was the solemn answer.

The nerveless fingers tried to bestow a thankful pressure, but she could only whisper:

"Dearest and best of women, may Christ ever keep you in his loving care. If dying lips can bestow blessings, oh, you will be blessed a thousand-fold.

"Ah! my time is so short, and I have much to say. Imogene has proud, passionate, rebellious blood in her veins. She comes of a wild, beautiful race, who ever allow their inordinate pride to ruthlessly trample their best love under foot. Therefore, for her dead mother's sake, bear tenderly and forgivingly with her future." Elinor paused, as if gathering strength for another effort. Mrs. Lee was quiet, too; only the drifting leaves fluttered through the oppressive stillness, that every moment seemed to increase; not a bird chirruped, not a bee hummed. Nature itself hushed her myriads of insect life that the dread messenger might more deeply impress humanity with his awful majesty.

The sufferer rallied her sinking spirit, and said, more strongly than before:

"Raise my head a little, Ruth; there, thank you. Now bring the pearl box from the bureau."

Ruth obeyed, and laid the small mother-o'-pearl box on the bed. It was a cherished souvenir of those long-shat-

tered "better days," and Elinor looked at it as you have seen tearless grief gaze at a closed coffin that contains all that the heart holds dear. The key Elinor always wore about her neck; she motioned Ruth to remove it, languidly indicating the clasp with fingers so cold that Ruth involuntarily started when they came in contact with her own. When the box lay open before her, Ruth felt disappointed, for it contained nothing but a tiny velvet case.

Reading the disappointment in her face, Elinor said, "I have no papers. I sent all the proofs across the sea, hoping that some day they might do *her* justice. This is all I have," opening the white velvet case and holding up a sparkling ring. "It fitted once," she said, musingly, turning it around and around on her thin finger.

It was a rare, costly ring, of odd workmanship and most appalling device — an emerald serpent coiling about a ruby heart, surrounded by a circlet of diamonds. Ruth, dismayed at so suggestive a love-pledge, turned away from the glittering thing, quite thankful that she wore a plain gold band on her third finger, and not the hideous emblem of a snake.

"It is the crest of her father's house," went on Elinor, "and rightfully belongs to Imogene. Give it her the day she is fifteen, and tell her that her mother wore it honorably. It brought me infinite sorrow and trouble, but *never* dishonor." A faint color crept into the wan cheeks, fading out to leave the set features still more pallid. Lovingly she laid the jewel against her murmuring lips, the green of the emerald flashing back the blush of the ruby, and kissed it a dozen times ere replacing it in its velvet bed. It was the pledge of that love which had broken her heart years agone; but it was still the dearest thing in the world to poor, dying Elinor. The last pang of earthly love over, she remained very quiet a moment; then she spoke again, but in a voice so feeble that Ruth strained her ear to listen:

"Sit close beside me, for I am failing rapidly, and you shall hear my story, the whole truth, and then —"

But Ruth never did from *her* lips, for the door quickly opened, and Imogene sprang lightly into the room.

"Too late," moaned Elinor; "I must have my child the little time left. Forgive me, Ruth, that you will never know the truth through me." Ruth covered her eyes, for she saw the gray shadow slowly creeping over the visibly sinking features. Going to the window, she saw Thaddeus under the maples, and beckoned him to come. Anticipating that help would be needed, he had remained near the house all day, and in a second noiselessly entered the sick-chamber. Imogene's black eyes, dilated with terror, gazed from Ruth to Thaddeus in bewildered amazement, unable to interpret their looks of utter sadness. At last she seemed to comprehend the awful solemnity of the hour, and, running up to the bed, she paused on tiptoe, as if to gain courage before looking upon the rigidness of death. With a low, choking sob, the child dropped her young head beside her mother's ashy face, the black ringlets in startling contrast with the parent's haggard, death-stricken countenance.

"Oh, mamma, mamma!" wept Imogene piteously; "Please, mamma, look up." The pleading voice called to energy the mother's last spark of life, and she gathered her arms about the lithe, graceful form, and drew her child for the last, last time to her almost pulseless bosom. Thaddeus forgot his old jealous prejudices when he saw Genie's flying curls settle all in a heap on the pillow and the agony expressed in the quivering face, that was all the more beautiful from the whiteness of the one beneath it.

Wrapped in that close embrace, Imogene for a little time lay quite still, but the painful silence aroused the passionate heart to a madness of hope. Perhaps her mother might not die! The thought was insanity, but the child seized upon it

with all the tenacity of her impetuous nature, and called out eagerly:

"Oh! mamma, dear, dear mamma, *do* please get warm." And she fell to rubbing cheeks and brow with the utmost vigor of her little, warm hands. She had seen them resort to this remedy when her mother had been attacked with protracted fainting-fits, and entreatingly coaxed and commanded Ruth to help her. Mrs. Lee, dreading one of her ungovernable outbursts, pretended to comply, but warmth and color would not come. Death's icy finger was there before them, and had frozen the life-blood at the fountain. Several times Elinor tried to speak, but the struggle ended with only a faint, inarticulate sound, like the gurgling of freezing waters. The dim eyes looked up, filled with unutterable love, and a something that hushed the wild tumult raging in Imogene's breast as effectually as if the poor child's heart had been turned into stone. By a mighty effort the stilling lips called back their power, and with a strength born of immediate dissolution, Elinor partially raised herself from the pillow and caught her child impulsively to her breast.

"God bless my daughter! Oh, Imogene, my darling, keep your mother's dying kiss as a shield between thee and evil. Remember this hour throughout all your future, that you were mother's poor darling, and that she blessed you while she died." Her hand wandered vaguely about, now lifted, now falling, as if seeking something. Ruth divined its intention, and gently placed it on the child's head. A satisfied smile lighted up the ghastly features. "I can't see you, Ruth, but I know your touch. God bless you. I leave my child to your care. Now I am done with earth." Reaching out her arms convulsively, she shivered slightly, and slowly closed her eyes. The sad, gray orbs were shut forever, but the white lips still trembled. Ruth bent her ear to listen. The one word "*Jasper*" was all she heard.

Elinor's last breath fluttered out with the name, and the fair English lady of Alden was dead. Imogene's grief knew no bounds. Thrusting away their pitying hands, she threw herself beside her mother's rigid form, and sobbingly begged her to speak. In vain Hetty consoled, and Mrs. Lee persuaded—she would not be removed, her only reply being:

"Oh, Aunt Ruth," (she always termed Mrs. Lee aunt,) "my mother is dead. She is cold, and cannot see. Won't she never, *never* hear me speak again? Oh, auntie, wake her up. I'll help you, and I'll always be good, and I won't strike Davie again, never, never. I'm awful sorry I was ever naughty and didn't mind you!"

Her cries and protestations were heart-rending. Ruth could not bear it, and, weeping bitterly, she turned her gaze from the black, beseeching child-eyes, appealing to her from that mother's stiffening corpse.

Thaddeus, in order to end this terrible heart-wringing, more dreadful than death itself, and deeming persuasion useless, took her forcibly away. She fought desperately against his authority.

"Put me down!" she cried, struggling violently in his arms. "Put me down! I hate you, Tad Ruggles! You shan't touch me. You shan't take me from my mother!" But her resistance was fruitless, for Thaddeus firmly bore her down stairs, she screaming at every step that she hated him, and wanted her mother. Ruth never forgot the mingled rage and anguish of that little tear-drenched face as it disappeared through the doorway. She remembered it in after years, when Imogene had need of forgiveness—remembered how the child's splendid eyes, blurred with passionate tears, looked back over Thad's tall shoulder, imploringly stretching her little arms toward her voiceless mother, and piteously crying for her to wake.

Thaddeus deposited his struggling burden on the sofa

in the sitting-room, and gravely commenced to define how impossible it was for her mother to come back, though she should call ever so loud. He might as well have talked to the wind. She would not hear him. Rage that *he* should dare to control her at such a time overpowered every other emotion, and the moment she found herself on her feet she darted away like an arrow. Poor Genie, she was in rare need of comfort, but the boy had never liked her well enough to sufficiently understand her nature; besides, he was grave, thoughtful, and matter-of-fact himself, and incapable of comprehending an impetuous being like Imogene. In her present great trouble his placid sympathy aggravated her tortured soul past endurance, and she burst away from his detaining hand, with fury blazing in her eyes, and words of muttered hate blistering on her infant tongue.

Thaddeus, dimly realizing his kindly meant overtures futile as regarded their ungrateful object, did not attempt to follow her, thinking, perhaps, that a violent grief like hers would find its best solace alone.

Rid of Thad's unasked condolence, Imogene fled out of the house, down through the sunflowers and hollyhocks, and hid herself under the great clump of lilacs by the back garden fence. Creeping under the dense green leaves at the root, where the frost had not been able to penetrate, she buried her face in the rank grass, weeping in silent bitterness, as she settled her bright head on its earthy pillow. Every faculty was benumbed by the one great woe, and, once alone, she gave her grief full vent, and writhed and moaned like a tortured animal.

"Oh, mamma, come back; oh, *do* come back!" was the plaintive refrain of each passionate outburst, and they who were so solemnly shrouding the mother little dreamed how the agonized child was crouching desolately under the lilac. The piteous words, "Oh, I'm *so* sorry that I was not *always*

good, so dreadful sorry," breathed up from the grass like the mournful echo of a buried heart pleading forgiveness from the grave, arrested the attention of one who, of all others, was best fitted to administer consolation to the bereaved child of Elinor Vale.

"Won't you let me be sorry with you, Gypsy?"

It was Philip Shirley, standing knee-deep in the grass, and commiseratingly gazing down at the little figure tumbled all in a bunch under the lilac. There was something particularly soothing in his tenderly modulated voice, which, never harsh and discordant even in his most boisterous moments, now sounded like sweetest music, coming as it did in response to the child's sad wail of despair.

Phil, happening to be near Hetty's much-prized hop-vine — you may be sure it was for no good — saw Imogene fly to cover, and instantly abandoned his own snug retreat to see what was the matter. His active mind at once guessed the truth, and half unconsciously he felt that the time to be kind to Genie had come.

At the sound of his familiar tones the girl hushed her sobs, and looked at him wistfully through her blinding tears.

"What 's the matter, Gypsy?"

There was magic in the deep-set, dark eyes so intently looking in her own, and with the desolate cry, "Oh, Phil, *my mother is dead!*" she threw herself into his arms, repeating over and over again the touching words in accents so utterly sad, that Phil hardly knew what to say. Faster and faster the hot tears rained on his neck; the lithe form trembled from head to foot, and the poor young heart throbbed and bounded in time to the terrible mental anguish. With both little, tremulous arms clinging frantically about his short neck, she cried, and shivered, and moaned, as if torn by bodily pain too great for mortal endurance.

"Don't cry so," pleaded Philip, absently smoothing out the great damp tear-spots from her little ruffled apron. "Don't cry so, Gypsy, and I 'll tell you something; and I never mean to tell any one *but* you, for it 's only about you and me."

"But my mother is dead," reminded Genie, as if it were sacrilege to speak of anything else, even though it be the sharing of a secret with him, an honor which was wont to make her the happiest of beings.

"But it 's about her," replied Phil, mysteriously.

"Oh!" said Genie, much relieved, relaxing her arms, and allowing the boy to put back her rumpled hair. "Then I 'll listen."

"Well," began Phil, very confidentially. "Well, Gypsy, *I* saw your mother the other day; *she* sent for me."

"What! you?"

"Yes, me! and I told her about the sirup, spignet, and balsam, and comfrey, you know; they 'll cure most coughs, but she said they would do her no good, and that in a little while she should die."

"And she did not tell me! Nobody told me!" broke in Imogene, beginning to cry again. Phil hastened to explain:

"Why, you were too little, Gypsy; beside, people never tell us about our mothers going to die, you know, or anybody that 's near to us; they wait till it comes."

"I can't bear to think of it. My dear mamma! She will have to be put in the ground now, and covered up deep, won't she, Phil?" Both shuddered at this painful picture, the youth venturing a faint "I suppose so;" but seeing the tears ready to start, he added:

"But there 's vaults, like houses on top of the ground; may be they 'll put her there." His idea somewhat comforted little Genie. She was meek enough now, and willing to listen to anything the boy might say. The stronger

nature met the strength of hers, and where Thaddeus had unconsciously irritated and enraged, Philip soothed and calmed.

"I'm sure, if your mother were here this minute, she would not like to see you take on so; and I am sure from where she is, she is feeling bad, because *you* feel so bad." Phil looked up to the clouds, indicating that her spirit must be somewhere in that direction. Imogene followed his gaze, half believing that her mother's face was smiling on them from the sky. The wistful eyes wandered back to her companion. "Do you think mother is sorry because I am so dreadfully unhappy, Phil?"

"I am sure of it."

"Then I won't be unhappy another minute," said Genie, determinedly, winking very hard to keep the tears back meanwhile. "Tell me just what you think she would want me to do, and I'll do it. I would not listen to Thad, but I will to *you*, Phil."

"One can't help feeling bad," philosophically admitted Philip; "I feel bad myself, and, maybe, it ain't so long ago that I cried, either." A suspicious twitching about the mouth indicated that he was very near indulging in the weakness at that moment.

"Well, what do you suppose she said to me?"

Genie shook her head as a sign that she could not tell.

"Why, that I was to be kind to you."

"Oh! did she, Phil; *did* she, for true?"

"Yes, as true as can be; and I promised, honor bright, that I would always stand up for you through thick and thin. And I always *will*, Gypsy."

Imogene, quietly sitting on the grass before him, with her little hands demurely folded, and the tear-stains yet on her cheeks, at this gallant speech could restrain her gratitude no longer. "Oh! you dear, dear Phil!" she cried, leaping into his arms, all in a tremble of joy. "And my

darling dead mother said that you were to take my part? I told her I liked you ever so much, Phil."

"Yes, she said that, too; and now I am going to be your brother and fight for you, and when I am a man I'll take care of you. Who knows but some day you 'll be my wife; *then* I'd like to see any one have anything to say."

"Yes," innocently acquiesced Genie; "I'll be your wife when I'm as tall as Aunt Ruth. Oh! won't it be splendid! And we'll hunt squirrels and birds'-nests all day, and nobody in the world to scold or make us mind."

Phil's ideas of matrimony were a little more exalted; but he did not care to impart his views just then, although it is quite likely they were equally as impracticable as poor Gypsy's own. Just now she was feeling terribly conscience-smitten, for she remembered that on several occasions she had treated Phil badly; and now that he was to love her and be her brother, she was anxious to make amends. Laying her small face against his broad shoulder, she frankly said:

"But I have not always been kind to you, Phil, you know. I bit you once till the blood came, and only last week I slapped you real hard."

"You *can* bite like a rat, that 's certain; but as to slapping, why, you could not kill a fly," laughed Phil, squeezing the mite of a hand playing with his own.

"I'm glad you don't mind, and I'll kiss you now, if you like?"

Without waiting an answer, she put up her cherry mouth. Phil was only thirteen, but he felt exceedingly queer about the heart. The little, loving thing curled up at his feet was such an atom of sparkling grace and beauty, how could he but be good to her when she was so fond of *him*. Thus, all unconscious to himself, he met the child's innocent lips with a love that combined the three great elements of his nature — courage to protect, ambition to elevate,

and affection to bless the life which from that day was completely his own, for good or ill. Time reversed and distracted those three godlike virtues; but under the lilac, that hazy October afternoon, they stood grandly forth, undimmed by ambitious temptations, and uncorroded by worldly sins. Of all earthly objects this little dark-browed girl was the dearest to him. She lay in his heart of hearts a folded bud, awaiting the maturity of manhood to blossom into perfection. Philip did not stop to analyze the sentiment that Imogene's little kiss engendered, but contented himself by reiterating his former determination: "Yes, I'll always love and be kind to you; but if I am cross sometimes, you must not mind. Now you will promise not to cry any more; I mean, not so hard, for you choked, you know, and could n't stop, and you must do as people say, and not get mad and tear about so."

"What! Thad, too?" asked Genie, ruefully.

"No; *he* ain't people; neither is that grumbling old Hetty. She hates me."

"Then *I'll* hate *her*," promptly responded Gypsy.

"That 's right," lauded Phil. "You listen to Mrs. Lee, though; she 'll never tell you anything but what's right. And now, if you will stand up, I 'll straighten your dress and wipe your face; it 's awful teary."

Genie meekly allowed him to arrange her skirts, tipping very weakly in the direction he pulled, quite helpless under his vigorous system of "straightening."

Evidently she was deeply impressed with Phil's new relation of protectorship, because her mother had sanctioned it, and her own heart warmly responded, even in its worst fits of rebellion, to everything he said or did; so it was easy to obey his commands at a time when those of others would have driven her frantic.

After being duly wiped up and smoothed, she surprised her companion by asking, "Will you go and see mamma

with me?" Philip hesitated; but the sorrowful little face turned toward him so confidingly, in its pleading earnestness, he could not refuse. He felt that his interview with Elinor was sacred, and shrank from having blurted about the village a conversation that in some mysterious way — or it seemed so to him — gave him the right to look after Imogene, and, before consenting to grant her request, he said:

"Gypsy, you will promise never to tell that I am to be kind to you, for I know your mother did not mean it to be talked about by all the old busybodies in town."

Torture could not have forced it from her after that, and she replied, most emphatically:

"No; I'll never tell. I'll keep it to myself always. Now come, Phil."

He took the hand she offered, and together they crept from under the lilacs, and made direct to the house. A subdued sound came from the kitchen; but the sitting-room was deserted. Softly they mounted the stairs, Philip's heart bounding thick and fast; Imogene's sinking faint and throbless within her. Twice she essayed to lift the latch; twice her hand drew back. It was almost dark in the passage, and it was pitiful to see the two white faces standing before the door of the east bedroom, with only the sickly light of the one dark-curtained window glimmering fitfully over their young forms. As the girl's courage faltered the boy's arose, and, turning his head, (for he dreaded the first glimpse of the shrouded figure,) he carefully opened the door. Great was their amazement to find the room empty. The windows were up, and the curtains swaying pleasantly in the twilight breeze, not in the least suggestive of death. The easy-chair was in its usual place, and Washington was still being reprimanded for hacking the cherry-tree. Everything was just as it used to be, only the bed; that was gone. Philip looked immensely relieved,

and glanced about quite boldly, considering his recent trepidation. "Where is she?" asked Imogene, huskily; "where have they taken my mother?" A wild, sickening terror leaped to the child's heart. Had they buried her so soon? She could account for her sudden disappearance from the old familiar room in no other way, and the agony expressed in the large black eyes was fearful to see. Philip thought he had rather encounter an army of dead faces than meet that look again.

"Don't you be frightened, Gypsy. If I had n't been a ninny, I 'd have guessed it. Why, don't you remember, they always puts them in the parlor after — after — "

Genie did not stop to hear the remainder of the sentence, but flitted down stairs. Her companion resignedly followed, wondering why they made houses so dark and uncomfortable when people died. The chill and oppressiveness pervading the silent dwelling started great drops of perspiration on his brow, and made him long for the cool, free air playing merrily with the leaves outside. Phil could have faced a lion at the moment, or challenged death at the cannon's mouth; but this required courage of a very different sort — the nerve to look on the dead features of a woman, young and fair, who had only a week before kissed and caressed him with a tenderness never before known. After all, it was love, not fear, that staggered the boy's brave heart, and made him shiver with inexplicable dread. But the first timidity was over, and the children entered the parlor with less hesitation than they had betrayed up stairs. The room, darkened to sombreness, made every object for the moment indistinct. "Dear Phil," whispered Genie, through the gloom. She uttered the words like one who did not expect or desire an answer; indeed, she scarcely knew that she had spoken. Oh! how still it was? Not a breath; not a motion. "See." It was Genie's voice that broke the silence. She was pointing to a pale outline in

the dim corner where the shadows lay thickest. "See, Philip, *there* is my mother." The dread was worse than the reality, for, once in the mysterious presence, the children shook off the benumbing feeling which so appals a young nature when contemplating in the mind the actual nearness of death. "Yes, she is here, and we won't be such cowards as to fear her because she is dead. She kissed me that day; did n't I tell you *that?*" Genie shook her head, and both stood looking at the quiet sleeper, in awed, wondering silence, that anything once so full of love and life could be so utterly rigid and voiceless.

"Dear mamma! and she kissed you when you promised to be good to me?"

"Indeed she did, Gypsy, ever so many times; and I cried —I could not help it—for she was so sad and tender with it all."

Philip touched the hands folded on the throbless breast, to see if they were really as cold as they looked. The few autumn flowers they loosely held, fell away, and Imogene sprang quickly to restore them. The mocking clasp refused to readily take back its loving trust; and while her little fingers were busy with the mother's poor dead hands and the senseless autumn flowers, she said:

"Dear mamma always thought of me—thought of me to the very last."

The child appeared ten years older than when she entered the room. One could hardly realize that she was the same little creature who had escaped from Thaddeus in a passion of tears and screams.

"My mother is in heaven, Philip, and can love me just the same. I don't feel so bad now; but it was dreadful to see her die; I'll kiss her good-night, as if she were not dead."

Leaning over, she pressed her lips on the cold brow, and laid her warm cheek against the frozen face, murmuring

softly, "Good night, mamma!" and, turning to her wondering companion, said, in a satisfied manner:

"Come, Phil, let's go; Aunt Ruth, or some of them, will be coming in. They try to be kind, but they only tease me. Mamma knows how well I love her, for she sees my heart *now*."

Philip followed her to the door; but there he paused and glanced back to the shadowy corner. Obeying a sudden impulse, he returned; and where Imogene's young lips had lingered last he pressed *his* farewell kiss. The door opened and closed with cautious sound; but she who reposed in the shadows gave no heed to their careful departure.

The sun had set long ago, and a ray of moonlight, penetrating the heavy curtains, fell across the motionless feet. Higher and higher climbed the solitary moonbeam, until it lay on the peaceful brow, radiating like a halo above the saintly head. Ah! who would break such dreamless rest?

Imogene astonished everybody by her changed behavior; and when Mrs. Lee asked if she would like to look at the dead, she replied, "No," very short.

"But she is in the parlor now, Genie, and looking so happy and beautiful!"

"I know it," said the child, briefly; "I've been there."

Ruth was confounded, and thought the child must be out of her senses.

"Yes, I've been there and fixed the flowers, Phil and I," she repeated, complacently, furtively eying Thaddeus, to see how he received the news of Philip's share in it.

"Why, Genie, we did not hear you," said Ruth.

"I know it, for we didn't make any noise. We went up stairs first, but she was gone. Phil told me where she was," naively explained Genie.

Mrs. Lee sighed and kissed her, and little Davie shyly offered her childish comfort. Farmer Lee took her on his knee and called her his wee black-eyed daughter. All these

more than usual endearments, on David's part, at least, Imogene stoically accepted as part of the calamity that had befallen her; but when Thaddeus offered his matter-of-fact consolation, she scornfully turned her back. The only request she made was that Philip might sit with her at the funeral. Hetty sternly opposed such a preposterous idea as having "that boy" around at such a solemn time. Thaddeus, too, thought the ungainly lad a little out of place, and did not hesitate to say so. But Genie was too much for them both, and firmly insisted: "He has the right, Aunt Ruth, more than all the world beside, and he *shall* sit near me when my mother is buried." Mrs. Lee felt the truth of this, for Genie had crept to her side when nobody was near, and said: "Aunt Ruth, please don't tell any one that mamma asked to see Phil that day. She said something then which gives him the right to go with me. *She* knew I was fond of him, and, indeed, auntie, he's always been good to me." Knowing this, Mrs. Lee took sides against Thaddeus and Hetty, much as she generally deferred to their opinion, and decided that Philip Shirley should be bidden to the funeral, and those who did not acquiesce in her decision were obliged to make the best of it. During the last solemn rites Genie kept near her companion, causing everybody to wonder at the singular power of the lad over one whom nobody else attempted to manage.

At last it was over — all the dreary funeral hush and stealthy footfall quiet. The children went back to their play, their books, and their mischief, and left her who had been known in the village as Elinor Vale tranquilly sleeping alone under the daisies.

CHAPTER VII.

WHAT COMES OF CATCHING A "CHIPMUNK."

TWICE had the grass been green on Elinor's grave, and life was still going on much in the old way with the children of our story. The day we find them, they are playing by the roadside, careless and happy. On either side of the highway lay Lot Colburn's fine meadow lands, with a patch of buckwheat in full flower at the right, and a stretch of rich timber far on the hills to the left. The huge gray rock, rising almost perpendicular from the roadside, was a favorite resting-place with the Lee children when returning from school. Carpeted with thick grass at the summit, where its rocky head met and was thinly covered by the rich soil, and shaded by a great hickory-tree, it made a retreat that would have enchanted the soul of an artist or poet. A rail fence, running close against the trunk of this mammoth tree, divided the highway from the meadow. All along the fence grew a dense thicket of elders, interspersed with hazel-bushes and blackberry-vines, which had in days gone by been of much peril to Philip's thin trowsers.

"Oh, Genie, ain't you glad school's out, and that we are to have such a long, splendid vacation?" exclaimed Vida, to her somewhat preoccupied companion, perched a little above her on the rock. To-day was the last of the term, and Vida, who was not over-fond of study, was delighted.

"I don't know," rejoined Imogene, indifferently. "I like school."

"But the lessons are so hard," complained the other.

"I don't mind them, and you are as old as I."

"Yes; but you learn everything so easy. Now, there is arithmetic. I can't do figures."

"That's because you are so stupid, Davie," was the uncomplimentary answer.

"I know it," humbly agreed Vida. "And there is the multiplication table; *that* I can't learn, only the fives and tens; they're easy, but the sevens and nines won't stay in my mind, and they're no good anyway."

Arithmetic always made poor Davie gloomy, and to detract from her natural terror of figures she proceeded to slowly unfold the napkin in the bottom of their mutual dinner-basket, producing therefrom a goodly slice of bread and butter.

"Won't you have a piece, Genie?" she asked, generously proffering to divide the slice by breaking it fairly in two.

Genie disdainfully shook her head.

"No; I don't like bread when it's been spread since morning."

"But I've kept it covered up, and it's real nice," said Vida, munching away with infinite relish. "What makes you look so put out? Have you been cross with Philip?"

"No, indeed," curtly replied Miss Genie, pulling at the leaves of a stunted mullein that grew beside her in the crevice of the rock. One by one, she had picked the tiny yellow blossoms, sifting them through her fingers into her apron in a very absent and indolent way, much to the disgust of Vida, who could not refrain from saying, "How can you touch these nasty-smelling mullein-blows? I would n't have them in my nice, clean apron."

"Oh, you need not take me to do about handling them. I saw you painting your cheeks with mullein-leaves only the other day — you know you did, Vida Lee — and then cried because they smarted," retorted Genie, with spirit.

Davie fidgeted under this sharp rebuke, and explored the depths of her dinner-basket before venturing a reply.

"I know I did; but I'll not do it again. Susie Johnson told me to, and she is a mean girl, for she didn't tell me the fuzz would smart so."

"Oh, you silly! why, it's the fuzz that makes the red come, and — and the sting too. Only simple girls paint their cheeks," concluded Genie, complacently patting her own, red as June roses, by way of indicating that nature alone was the true artist.

Vida was quite accustomed to being snubbed by her sparkling, black-eyed playfellow, and continued to eat her bread and butter, pausing every now and then to scrape the butter from the centre around the less plentifully supplied crusty edges, as a more appetizing way of equalizing it, and kicking the toes of her little shoes against the turf in the best-natured and happiest manner imaginable. Yet they dearly loved each other in their way, just as you have seen two sisters of widely different dispositions — the one weak and timid, the other strong and self-confident — love and reprove alternately. If Genie were cross, Davie patiently waited until she became good-natured; then they laid their dear little faces together, just the most loving sisters in the world. And though she might bring Vida up with a round turn, Imogene would by no means allow any one else to do so. And she had soundly boxed Susie Johnson's ears for tempting Davie to paint her cheeks, and scolded Davie for being tempted, all the time she was washing off the smarting mullein-fuzz.

The reason of Imogene's present extreme disinclination to sympathize with Davie's school-troubles and dinner-basket was due to the deep interest she was taking in Philip Shirley's movements across the road, where he was laboriously endeavoring to capture a chipmunk, which had taken refuge in the stone wall.

The girls, perched on the rock, were interested spectators of what was going on opposite. Vida secretly hoped

the little animal would escape, and Genie was only anxious for Philip's success. Unmindful of either their applause or censure, Phil tugged and sweated below, with his great dog Hero by his side, wagging his shaggy tail in eager expectation. Hero was, in his canine way, quite as famous as his master, aiding and abetting him in many of his evil rambles around the neighborhood; for Hero could kill a chicken, cat, woodchuck, or squirrel at a single bite, and without the slightest noise, which was the grand feature in Hero's dissolute character, according to his master's estimation of what constituted value in his race. And then his patience was something touching to see, especially in the case of woodchucks; he would scratch at the hole all day, if Phil were by to cheer him on; and a cat or a squirrel up a tree would rivet his attention for hours together, watching with eager eye and watering mouth, and whimpering in rage and grief that he could not get at them. Phil thought it a mistake in nature that dogs could not climb, when they had sense to look so wishful up a tree, for all the world like a boy who was afraid of his trowsers and his mother, and the chestnuts and walnuts just ripe enough *not* to fall.

At the present time, Hero was all excitement, bounding over the wall, first on one side, then on the other, to run nosing along a rod or two, and then back again, to stand whisking his bushy tail, and lolling his great red tongue in a perfect ecstasy of dog delight. Occasionally he gave a series of short sniffs in the wall, expressive of alertness, importing by his quick, suppressed, and irregular barks the nearness of the game.

"I hope he won't get it," said Davie, with a little shiver of dread. "Squirrels are so cunning."

"It ain't a squirrel, it 's a chipmunk," corrected Genie, looking steadily at the wall.

"Well, they are all the same. Father calls them striped

squirrels, and *he* knows," replied Davie, in a convincing tone, as if nothing could supersede "father's" knowledge in her opinion.

Imogene did not choose to argue this point of natural history with Davie, although she had her own mind on the subject, Mr. Lee to the contrary.

In the mean time, Phil had been preparing for immediate and brilliant strategy. Having determined, by Hero's ingenious caperings, the exact locality of his diminutive prey, he pulled out a sufficient number of stones to admit of seeing through the wall at either end of the spot where he had located the game. In one opening he plugged his jacket, and at the other he posted the well-disciplined Hero, commencing a vigorous attack in the centre himself with a very sharp stick. With every avenue of escape or retreat thus hopelessly cut off, the besieged chipmunk was obliged to surrender. With a last desperate effort to make off, he attempted to run Hero's post, but the dog snapped him up in a twinkling, and laid him, with a broken back, at his master's feet.

Phil recovered his jacket, seized his game, and triumphantly clambered up to the girls, entirely forgetting to replace the stones in the much-injured wall. Hero, with the look and air of a supremely happy and self-satisfied dog, laid himself down at the foot of the hickory for a nap, not, however, without lifting his head several times toward the hazel and elder bushes, suspiciously glancing askant through the dense foliage, as if something might be concealed there.

Imogene being some little distance higher than her less aspiring companion, Philip stopped in his ascent, and, as was quite natural, showed Davie his little victim.

Inconsiderate Genie did not like this. She thought he ought to show it to her first, and, much offended, she turned all her attention in the opposite direction.

Vida took the animal in her lap, and softly stroked the pretty black stripes. Her tender little heart could not bear to see anything wantonly hurt, and her eyes filled with compassionate tears on feeling its poor little broken back under the pretty black stripes, and she said earnestly, "I am so sorry you killed it, Philip. Such a beautiful little creature. See what bright large eyes, just like black beads, and they won't stay shut either, but look up so sorry like when I take my finger off of them; and only a moment ago he was running so nimbly on the fence. Dear little feet, they 'll never scamper any more! It 's wicked to kill such pretty creatures, for God made them on purpose to play around in the sunshine and be happy, and I know he is angry to have them hurt."

"Well, if it 's wicked, I 'm sorry," said Phil, penitently. "They *do* look better skittering along on the walls and fences than they do so still and limpsy. But it 's all Hero's fault. He won't let 'em alone," hypocritically blamed Phil. "Look here, you rascal, how dared you kill this, eh?" holding up the chipmunk to Hero's indifferent gaze, who bent back one ear, and winked reproachfully from under his half-closed eyelids at such an unjust reprimand; but considering it of no further notice, he gaped lazily, and stretched his nose along the cool earth to enjoy another nap.

"Why, what have you done with his beautiful tail?" exclaimed Vida, suddenly discovering that the chipmunk was minus that showy appendage.

Now the truth is, as every schoolboy knows, that chipmunks' tails are very indifferently put on, and this particular one having evaded Phil several times at close quarters, during the stone-wall encounter, had lost that graceful and attractive portion of his anatomy early in the engagement. But Davie was not aware of this fact, and repeated her question, looking at Hero as if he might be responsible for the missing member.

"I suppose I pulled it off," replied Phil; "but it don't hurt 'em any."

"Don't it? Why, that's nice," said Davie, greatly comforted by the knowledge.

"Not a bit. Sometimes the chipmunks don't know it themselves," confidentially explained Phil, though how he came to know was quite a mystery to confiding little Vida.

"And is this bit of white thread all his tail hung on?" she inquired, in tearful interest, designating the slender tip of the animal's mutilated tail.

"Yes," said Phil; "the bushy part is all gammon; and if you so much as touch 'em they're off; and squirrels without tails ain't much."

"That is true," acknowledged his listener. "But I'm sorry it's dead, and if you were my brother, I'd beg you never to hurt one again."

"Well, you can ask me if I'm not your brother; I shan't eat you," rejoined the lad, impetuously. During all this time Imogene had not once spoken, but she had been listening intently, and her heart swelled at this. Was he going to be *her* brother, too? A jealous pang darted to her heart, and she felt like screaming under the new, fierce pain. Davie had father, mother, and home, but she had only — Philip. Unconscious of the tumult raging in her breast, Vida went on, innocently:

"Then, Phil, I'll make believe you are my brother, and ask you to never be cruel to anything that God has put in the woods and meadows; for mother says, 'He loves them, and provides for their wants just as He does for us.'"

"All right," assented the boy, a roguish twinkle gleaming in the deep-set eyes. "You hear, Hero; woodchucks are played out," glancing at that incredulous animal, with his tongue in his cheek. Then his twinkling eyes went up to Imogene, and his feet also.

"You don't care for a dead chipmunk, do you, Gypsy?"

She would not look nor answer, but kept her face steadily turned away.

"What, are you sulky, Gyp?" he asked, maliciously.

"I hope Mr. Colburn will have you punished for tearing down his wall, that I do. And I am not such a fool as to cry about a poor, mean, little chipmunk," she burst out, spitefully.

"Well, you need not be so spunky about it, Miss Spitfire; I did n't expect *you* would cry, for you have such a tough heart," he retorted.

Imogene's lips quivered at the taunt, and she twisted her fingers in her apron like one suffering intense pain, but her tongue did not lose its bitterness.

"I would not be so mean as to do a thing and then pretend to be sorry, when you know you will kill just the first squirrel you see; and Davie is a dunce to believe you."

"Oh, what a shrewd one!" with an admiring nod and wink. "You are not to be easily woolled; and as you 're so smart, you shall have the chipmunk. There," and Phil derisively tossed the animal into her lap. Imogene was furious. She thought he was making fun of her for Vida's amusement, and, snatching up the offending object, she hurled it against the stone wall across the road. Philip instantly sprang after it, enraged beyond words, and with all his strength threw it back, directly at her. It struck her full in the forehead, leaving a single great drop of blood on the smooth whiteness of the perfect brow.

From being so freely used as an impromptu weapon of offence and defence, the little striped squirrel was considerably damaged about the head, and it was the crimson from his battered physiognomy that left the woful stain on Imogene's young brow.

Davie thought she would be very angry at the atrocious insult; but the first fury was over, and, instead of dashing

it back, she tenderly laid the poor, bruised little creature on the grass, and covered it nicely over with mullein-leaves.

"Why, there is blood on your face, Genie," cried Vida, in alarm, thinking she had been injured by the blow.

"Yes; and I am glad of it," said the boy, determined to brave it out.

Imogene's haughty lips curled in childish scorn, flashing down on him the full light of the large, proud eyes. She cried, "You need not boast, Phil Shirley. Who cares for a drop of blood? I don't. Why should you care? Blood will always follow your footsteps. And you know, Davie, it takes brave boys to fight little girls." Her sarcasm cut him to the quick, and with that bright, red spot on her forehead, he dared not look at the scornful face; so he walked sullenly to the fence, and commenced to cut a straggling initial on the topmost rail, with a knife that looked as if it might have been in existence long before its present owner. At this timely juncture a rumbling of wheels heralded the rapid approach of a light wagon, and immediately after a pair of gray roadsters trotted around the curve.

"Oh, here comes *our* team, Genie," cried Davie, gleefully. "My! but won't we have a ride home?"

Sure enough, they were David Lee's horses, driven by Mr. Thaddeus Ruggles. He drew up opposite the girls, and called out, "Come, jump in, and I'll take you home." Vida instantly sprang up, for Thad's word was her law, and began to scramble down the bank.

"Come, Genie, let's go with Thad. Phil is so wicked he may stay alone." But Imogene sat still, quite ignoring the gray team, and Phil kept severely on with his initial.

Davie's voice again sounded up the bank. She was close beside the wagon, swinging her dinner-basket in one hand, and beckoning with the other:

"Come, sis, Thad's in a hurry."

"I don't want to," was answered from the top of the rock.

"Oh, do, Genie."

"I say I don't want to." The words tumbled down sharply, but the other was persistent.

"Do, *please* come."

"*I shan't*," echoed the voice above.

The decisive reply completely silenced Vida, and, without more entreaty, she clambered up beside Thaddeus, who put his arm around the little, restless form to keep her from falling out, for her feet were dangling six inches from the bottom of the wagon, and Thad was always very careful of this sweet, little, happy-hearted Vida Lee.

"Is not Imogene coming?" asked Thaddeus.

"No; she says she won't," said Davie, dismally twisting the strings of her highly starched sun-bonnet.

"She is cross again, I suppose. What is the matter with her?" impatiently inquired the youth, gathering up the reins.

"Phil hit her with the chipmunk."

"With the what?"

"Why, with the chipmunk he killed just now."

The youth's brow clouded.

"You ought not to play with that bad boy, Vida; he is a naughty, rude companion for such little girls as you and Imogene."

"But he has promised to be good, and never kill another squirrel nor anything, and he is not bad to me; and I don't like to leave Genie, for we were to dress our dolls this evening," pleaded the child, a deal of sadness in her sunny eyes.

"Well, I am sorry, pet, but if she will not come, she *will* not, and I have no time to wait her pleasure" — resolutely starting the grays.

Vida urged no more, but she was feeling very uncomfortable, and her little pink and white face kept looking back until lost in the windings of the road.

CHAPTER VIII.

REPENTANCE.

PHIL waited until the last faint sound of the receding wheels died away, and, still hacking at the rail, with his back turned toward her, said, with very strong emphasis, "You are not a nice-behaved girl, Miss Gypsy Vale, *I* can tell you, and I don't like you."

"I don't care," glancing furtively at him.

"You made Davie feel real bad."

"I don't care," with a deeper frown and more spiteful than before

"Well, *I*'d be ashamed to say so, *I* would," piously lifting the hand that held the knife, as if her arrant ingratitude were something he could never vindicate.

"You, indeed," sneered Genie; "why, you are wickeder than me; you know you are."

Phil did not take the trouble to deny the assertion, and tormentingly continued his laudations of Davie, in a tone so exceedingly tender that it galled the very soul of this poor, jealously angry listener.

"Davie is a good little girl, *she* is, and I like her. I like her better than you, old ugly."

"If you think so much of her, what did you speak to me for about your old chipmunk? Did you think that *I*'d listen after *she*'d been told everything? No, I'd have died first, Phil Shirley!" cried Genie, clenching her hands so tightly in her apron that they threatened to tear it in pieces. Every inch of her little body was quivering with rage, mingled with a flood of passionate sorrow and bitterness that he should prefer any one to her.

Her words came like a new revelation to Philip. He

had intended to irritate her by his praises of Davie, and in his aggravating way deliberately set out to "get her spunk up, and pay her off for being so mean," as he termed it. But he did not dream that it was his innocent attentions to Davie that at first inspired her anger. The knowledge pleased him hugely. Here was a grand opportunity for showing his power. Genie must be punished for being such a goose. His sharp, black eyes opened to their fullest extent, and a low whistle of astonishment caused Hero to lift his nose inquiringly. Phil gave a parting lunge at the rail, slowly doubled up his jack-knife, dropped it to the lowest depths of his capacious pocket, and circumspectly advanced a few steps nearer his companion, who stubbornly pretended not to see him, and provokingly cried out, in a taunting voice: "Oh, ho! and so, Miss Gypsy, you are jealous — that's it, spitfire. Shame on you! I'd be *so* ashamed, if *I* were a girl!"

This brought the tears, and she hung her head, too hurt and miserable for a reply; the bright drops falling fast and heavy in her lap. Phil's heart relented, but she must be punished, and he continued in a somewhat different strain:

"Now, look here, haven't I always stood up for you, Gypsy?"

"Yes," hesitatingly acknowledged Genie.

"Haven't I always licked everybody that plagued you?"

"Ye-s-s," faintly.

"Haven't I always divided with you?"

"Yes," still more faintly.

"And since I said I would, up to now, haven't I always thought most of you?"

"Yes, Phil," very contritely.

"Then why did you twit me of fighting little girls? You said a false thing then, now didn't you?"

Genie, feeling the force and justice of these awful ques-

tions, hitched a little farther away from him, and fingered the hem of her apron in silence.

"Now own up, Gypsy," advised Phil, severely — "own up that you were jealous because I showed Davie the squirrel first. It was selfish and cross of you, Miss, that it was, and nothing else." Imogene was conscious-smitten at the enormity of her sins, as spread before her by the relentless Philip, and meditated instant flight as the only means to rid herself of his terrible rebukes, which, to her, were the most fearful that ever fell on mortal ear.

"Don't tease me, Phil," she pleaded, "I feel so bad. I guess I 'm sick, and I am going to run right home just as fast as I can." She jumped to her feet, and began to tie on her hat.

"No, you are not," said Phil, snatching it from her hand. "You are not going one step until you own up." Had it been Thaddeus Ruggles speaking, she would have struck him in the face, and spit at him her disregard of his authority; but it was Philip Shirley, and she trembled instead.

"Own up now," again sternly commanded the lad. "I won't let you go home till you do. No, not if you should cry your eyes out." He had never been so savage with her before, and poor Genie's heart quaked.

Dropping down on the ground, she hid her burning face, afraid to look into the determined eyes flashing above her. "Oh, let me go home; please *do*," she begged in a smothered voice from the grass. "My head aches so, and I feel so bad. Do let me go, Phil."

"Not till you have owned up. You know I won't go back on *that*, Gypsy, if you begged from now to Christmas."

"You know I don't like to be slighted," cautiously conceded the smothered voice. Genie felt that he was in dreadful earnest, and that she must admit something.

"Well, who has slighted you?" questioned Phil, not a whit mollified by her half concession. Gypsy considered

this blunt interrogation unanswerable, from the fact that if she ventured to define the nature of the slight more clearly, it would be just the acknowledgment he was bent on compelling her to make, and she was not yet prepared for her entire capitulation. But it was so dreadful to have Philip angry with her, that she was willing to compromise the matter to an amicable settlement, and slipping her little hand in his, to add the more force, if possible, to her entreaty, she said, with her face still in the grass:

"Don't ask me in that way, and I will." Philip was quite ready to modify his demand, for he was tired of paining the little fury, when her voice choked itself in tears, and she lay humble and shivering at his feet; therefore it was a great relief to say more kindly, almost tenderly:

"Well, Gyp, now was n't you jealous?" Philip was sitting a little above her on the grass, so that she had to reach the small trembling hand up to him, an effort that the lad well knew cost her pride and temper a great deal, and the slight, encouraging squeeze he gave the dainty fingers doubtless prompted her to stealthily peep at him from under the shelter of her arm. The strong face was firm as iron, and Genie withdrew her glance in hopeless misery. She was certain that he would never forgive her, but the change in his tone made her forget it, and brought her instantly to her feet.

"What was it, Gypsy?" The voice was wholly sweet and tender this time, and with her warm, impetuous heart on her lips, she knelt down beside him, folded her two pretty hands on his knee, and looking up earnestly in his face, said simply, "*You* know."

"Of course I do," replied the lad, delighted that he had so completely conquered; "you were as jealous as an old hen, and you are such a pepper-pod."

Genie's curls, from contact with the earth, had picked up a dozen or more of the scattered mullein "blows," which

seemed irretrievably tangled in the black, glistening mass, much to Phil's dismay, for he was proud of her witching hair, and somehow his mind dimly associated mullein-blows with burdock burrs. He vividly remembered that he had once thoroughly adorned a confiding playfellow's head with the latter, and that in consequence every lock was necessarily severed as close as the sensitiveness of the scalp would permit. For several minutes he was busily occupied in picking the tiny yellow blossoms from Genie's wavy ringlets, she all the time quite mute, and still as a mouse under his hands. Phil's touch was always like a caress to her, and she accepted it as you have seen a vicious horse grow mild and manageable under a gentle voice and stroke.

"That spot of dry blood looks ugly on your forehead; let me rub it off," said Phil, very generously considering how it came there.

Genie quickly produced her handkerchief; there was a little remorse in the sight of it, for Davie had given it to her; and after moistening the corner of it with his tongue, Phil gravely proceeded to efface the "ugly" stain.

"You like me now, don't you?" asked Genie, anxiously.

"Of course I do."

"Better than Davie?" the little face lifted eagerly to read the answer in his eyes.

"You know I do, and always will; that was only say-so," replied Phil, convincingly stopping every other word to moisten the handkerchief. "There now, it is all off, and I'm not such a bad fellow after all, am I now, if I do kill chipmunks?"

Imogene was quite as happy in her defeat as Philip was in his victory, and all the old child-love and faith flowed warmly back to her heart again, and the fierce temper and passion of her nature lulled itself once more to quiet in her bosom.

"Yes, indeed you are good," she whispered affectionately,

rubbing her soft cheek against his rough sleeve; "and when I am at my very worst, *I love you*, Phil."

The boy doubtless thought this exceedingly gratifying to his self-vanity, and continued to play with the dark rings of hair on her forehead like one who had a right to kiss or cuff her at pleasure. But the lad's mind was taking a stride in advance of his years, and he asked rather wistfully:

"Do you think you will love me as well as now, when you are a woman, Gypsy?"

"Oh, yes, Phil, indeed I will! Maybe I'll love you better then," innocently replied the child, her large young gaze fixed lovingly upon him, as if to live and not love Phil Shirley were impossible.

"But some day I may go away; what will you do when I am gone? Forget me, eh?"

The boy looked very much as if she would not, and Genie looked very much frightened at the bare suggestion.

"Going away! Where?" she whispered, folding both hands over his arm and creeping closer to him.

"Why, to do for myself. I've been thinking about it this long time. I have made up my mind to be a soldier; march after the drum, r-r-rat-tat-tat — fight — kill — win —and all that sort of thing, you know," replied Phil, enthusiastically, imitating the roll of an imaginary drum, and the "*zip*" of visionary bullets, to the infinite consternation of his little listener. The bold decision, delivered in so warlike a manner, almost took away her breath; but after a moment's deep reflection, she seemed to think that it was only one of Phil's "say-sos," and said brightly:

"You forget that soldiers are sent away off to some grand school to *learn* how to kill people; and the side that kills the most, *that*'s victory. My history says so, and soldiers are taught how to slay with cannons, and guns, and pistols, and — and swords," gravely enumerating these murderous

weapons on the tips of her fingers. "Don't you remember Lawrence Parker went to this great school, and came back in gray clothes that were awful tight for him, and then they sent him away off, oh! ever and ever so far, among the wicked Indians?"

"Why, that 's the fun of it, killing Injuns," sanguinarily remarked Phil. "What 's the good of being a soldier if you don't fight? and soldiers don't have to go to any grand school, either; anybody can be a private; only the officers go to the military school. They non-commission up to lieutenants, and if they will give me half a chance I 'll soon be a corporal, and a sergeant next. I have read all about the different ranks. Sergeants sometimes have command of ten men, and make jolly fights on their own hooks. You can just bet that if I go into the army, I'll win up to the shoulder-straps anyway."

"And leave me! Oh, Phil!" The little face went down to his knee, the black eyes blinded with tears, and the rosy lips trembling in grief.

"Don't cry, Gypsy, for I 'll come back for you. You will be a woman in eight more years, and then I 'll take you with me," comforted the lad, thoroughly believing, in youth's simplicity, all he said.

"Oh! how kind of you," cried Genie, putting her arms about his neck in the excess of her gratitude. Suddenly a new fear entered her mind, and she questioned doubtingly: "But will we be just the same when we are grown up? You are 'most a man, and I am such a little girl. I dare not think ahead so many years," sighed the child, looking down despairingly at her little figure, and inwardly wishing it were as long as its shadow on the rock, which was some fifteen feet.

"Well, you need n't worry yourself yet; I may not go for a long time; but when I *do*, don't you be surprised, that 's all, and be hurt, and say I did n't tell you; and mind

you, keep it to yourself," soothed and commanded the boy simultaneously.

Imogene was never so happy as when sharing a secret with Philip, and the knowledge that he had voluntarily intrusted so important a one to her keeping took away half the sorrow it had caused her. She felt very proud of his confidence, and purred around him like an affectionate kitten, with all the scratch and spirit sheathed in the velvet softness of her love.

Ah! woe for you, Philip Shirley, when you bow that beautiful head in the dust of its own humiliation, and arouse that proud heart to the full anger of its insulted love! Neither dreamed that their path would so soon divide, and that never, oh! never again, during the sunny days of their childhood, were they to linger under the moving shade of the old hickory and premise sweet things of the future.

"It is nearly sundown!" cried Philip, critically noting the western sky. "Come, get your hat. There, I tied a hard knot that time." This last referred to the green strings of Gypsy's straw hat, which he had kindly tied in half a dozen of the hardest kind of knots under her chin. Lifting her like a passive doll, he slid down the bank, safely depositing her on the short grass of the roadside. Hero scampered after them at full tilt, and the lone old rock stood deserted. Slowly along the road the two figures made their way, followed by the great clumsy dog; Philip holding her hand, and she trotting by his side, the green ribbons of her hat fluttering in the light breeze, the summer leaves tipped with fading sunlight, and the scent of buckwheat in all the air. Oh! remember it, man and woman, when ye shall be widely sundered, remember this scene and hour, and turn back forgivingly to its truth and innocence!

Five minutes after their forms disappeared, a fine-faced,

elderly gentleman emerged from the hazel thicket, and sprang over the fence. He paused before the visible traces of Philip's piratical jack-knife. "P. S., and very well cut," muttered this genteel individual, commendingly, advancing, as he spoke, and lightly touching the discarded body of the chipmunk with the toe of his highly polished boot. "Well, little folks," he soliloquized, one hand deep in his pocket, and his eyes bent on the ground, in a reflective attitude, "I see you have your troubles as well as older people. Stopped my water-pipes, confound him! but the scamp has a grand intellect, nevertheless, and he hopes to be a corporal; ah! his ambition flies high — a sergeant and ten men — hum. He showed the skill of a general in the capture of this little animal" — turning it over with his foot. "He is such a rascal and nuisance to the whole village; by Jove, I 'll put the young villain in training; he will be a credit to the army; but that witch of a girl, with her infant form and woman's heart, will she get over the pain of parting with him? The fair-haired one was David Lee's daughter — nice man, um! constituent — but the dark face of the Gypsy is all beauty and fire; character there, too, of a lofty type. I don't remember of ever having seen the child before. I 'd not be apt to forget so striking a countenance. Belongs in the village, I suppose?" A thoughtful whistle ended the summary. From this random self-communing it was quite evident that he had been a close spectator of the little drama enacted under the hickory, and that he was deeply impressed by the touching simplicity and strong affection exhibited in both impetuous natures, for he kept muttering, even after he commenced his walk to the village. "She is a bright, artless creature; jealous, though, as ten furies; and he has a fine head, good eye, and is longing to be a corporal — ha! ha!" The genteel individual laughed softly, apparently greatly pleased with his mental resolves, and leisurely walked away.

CHAPTER IX.

PHILIP ENTERS UPON HIS CAREER.

LIKE most large towns, Alden had its great man, no less a personage than the Honorable Lot Colburn, Member of Congress, who, of course, vastly outranked the lawyer, doctor, and minister of the village, important as were the functions of those august gentlemen in its rural society. The Honorable Lot had been twice elected to Congress, and in the House was considered a leading and superior man. Affable in manners, and dignified in speech, he was the pet of his district, and whatever he said or did was sure to meet the entire approbation of the community. Mr. Colburn spent the winter in Washington, but his summers were invariably passed with his Alden constituency. His spacious and well-appointed residence seldom boasted visitors, either of the neighborhood or elsewhere, for the honorable member was a widower, and his only daughter, Olive, a confirmed invalid. Lame from her infancy, the poor girl shrank from society, and hid her misfortune in the seclusion and quiet of her pleasant home. Everybody said that her father's devotion was something wonderful, for, although in the prime of life, for the sake of this sad, pale, afflicted daughter, he had never married — a fact which a score of Alden belles privately deplored, secretly wishing that Olive were less fragile or her father less devoted. Some there were who accused the Hon. Lot Colburn of being eccentric, and given to doing queer things in a queer way that was quite puzzling to the obtuse villagers, who, while they applauded, inwardly wondered. But Lot Colburn did not mind. Why need he? Firmly established in the hearts and confidence of the people, his opinions and eccentricities

passed without question, and were often wisdom in an *outre* garb. He was exceedingly neat in dress, from the tie of his cravat to the tip of his boots. His slightly gray side-whiskers faultlessly trimmed, and chin and lips smoothly shaved, gave him the appearance of a scrupulously genteel man — as particular regarding the fit of his coat as he was precise in his political speeches and his every-day English. He was fond of lonely rambles through the woods and fields, and in the habit of taking solitary and frequent walks around his extensive estate. A fine field of corn or wheat was a perpetual pleasure to him, and the ripening grain of the harvest lots possessed a silent and never-wearying charm to the scholarly statesman that few natures were capable of understanding. It was this gentleman's wall that Philip had unceremoniously pulled down, and forgotten to put up, in pursuit of the chipmunk. It was his rail that the unscrupulous youth had hacked, and, in short, it was this distinguished individual himself who emerged from the hazel thicket, and meditatively watch the lad and lass go down the dusty road.

He was sitting alone in his handsome library on the following day, when a servant entered and announced briefly: "The boy you want to see, sir, is in the hall. I had hard work to get him here; suspects it's a trick on him for some of his devilments, I suppose, and may bolt any minute, sir."

"Show him in, Sam," said Mr. Colburn, shoving aside the huge folio he was reading, preparatory to giving audience to the bolter in the hall.

Sam promptly obeyed, and immediately ushered in his wily charge, who was none other than Philip Shirley, with an extra rent in his jacket, and a wicked twinkle in his black, audacious eyes, mentally concluding "that if Lot Colburn was fixing to trap him, the gay old honorable would find him up to snuff in just the little half of a second." Sam shut the door, with a dubious shake of his head that

was ominous of no good, and Philip modestly leaned against the wall, curious to know what was wanted of him, dimly divining that it must be the injured stone wall. He narrowly watched the eccentric member from beneath his projecting brows, and the more he looked the more certain he became that it was the wall. He also called to mind sundry other depredations, more or less damaging to the honorable member's personal property, and, in consequence, had serious misgivings as to the honorable member's friendly intentions.

Mr. Colburn, who never did anything in a hurry, slowly ran his fingers a couple of times through his dark hair, slightly frosty about the temples, but soft and abundant. Phil secretly wondered if that was his style when going in for a smashing speech before the House. Then he deliberately settled his neat ebon-rimmed eye-glass astride his well-shaped nose, and coolly proceeded to take a careful survey of his uncouth and extremely unwilling visitor. Young Shirley stood this minute scanning admirably, not at all abashed by the critical and prolonged gaze of the member's keen, steel-gray eyes.

It was the veritable Phil Shirley, of eight years ago, with the same massive head and broad shoulders of a man, and nothing in the way of legs. Deprived of a neck, his head had the appearance of being set square on his solid shoulders, like an addition on a rudely-put-together house — the same watchful dark eyes, ever on the alert, and bristling crop of close-cut hair. Some people would have pronounced him a very unprepossessing youth, of no earthly use in the world, only to harass and torment well-disposed people out of all patience. But the member thought differently, and seemed to be perfectly satisfied with the boy's personal appearance. Drawing a long breath, he said, interrogatively: "Well, sir?"

"Yes, thank you, sir; quite well," politely answered Phil,

pinching the rim of his battered hat bashfully, an excess of modesty which the snap in his eye plainly refuted. Mr. Colburn understood it and smiled, walking twice up and down before renewing the conversation.

"How old are you?"

"Fifteen, sir."

"Hum! you don't look like it," mused his interlocutor, again running his eyes over the lad's stunted figure. "You are a queer-looking boy; nature seems to have tumbled you together anyhow. Nothing about you appears to balance. Physically you are a decided failure; but mentally — ah! there, sir, I have hopes of you. Now, my boy, if you had your choice in selecting a profession in life, what would it be?"

"A soldier, sir," promptly replied Phil, with kindling eyes and a quick lifting of his head.

"Very good," said the member, approvingly. "You are called a pretty rough, wild sort of a boy here in Alden, I believe."

"Rather," was the dubious answer, delivered without the least hesitation, and accompanied by a sly glance that contained more meaning than words.

"Good again; not that I commend your wild acts, but I like your frankness. The village wants to get rid of you, and you want to get rid of the village — that's about it, eh?"

"Yes, sir; you have hit it. I think I will be as glad to go as the village will be glad to have me go. Few old shoes they will throw after me, sir; and little do I care for it, either," said Phil, nodding defiantly toward the steeple of Alden's church, as if it were associated with the malice of his worst enemies. The spire was just visible from the library window, and unconsciously Lot Colburn's eyes lighted in that direction.

"You should not be vindictive, Philip; you see, *I* have had occasion to remember your name and am inclined to

think you richly merit the indignation of a great many people hereabouts. But that's not the question. I sent for you to make you an offer. How would you like to go to West Point? You want to be a soldier. They will make you a first-class one there, and afterward send you out on the plains to skin Indians by way of practically finishing your education. How do you like the proposition?"

Philip, for once in his life, was so utterly astounded that for the moment he could not reply. The color went and came so rapidly that his tanned cheeks were alternately red and pale, with the fluctuating emotions stirring his sturdy heart to its utmost bottom.

"Oh, sir," he began, his voice a little tremulous, and at its most melodious pitch, "Oh, sir, are you in earnest? I know you have the power — it's the Congressmen as do it. But I did n't believe anything so good could ever come to me."

"Rest assured that I am in earnest, and your name shall be entered for this year. In two months, hold yourself ready. West Point will give you a pair of shoulder-straps to start with; you must win the rest yourself."

"I'll do it, sir. I know I'll win, and I'll send my first colors to you. Trust me, but I'll wear the best sword in the army, sir, if hard fighting will gain it," cried Phil, all the latent ambition of his soul leaping to his sparkling eyes. "If they'll only shove me into plenty of fights, I'll show you what the worst boy in Alden is made of. That's all I'll ask of the United States — plenty of tough old fights."

"You have a boy's enthusiasm, but I suppose a sage would say it foreshadowed the man's purpose and ability," replied Lot Colburn. "You will have to study hard, and leave off your wild pranks, for a military school is a very strict one, and disobedience is irredeemable disgrace. The first principle of a military calling is to obey. I trust your good sense and eager desire to become a good officer will tell you how to act in a matter where everything depends on exemplary

conduct. I offer you this cadetship after due consideration as to its wisdom on my part, and its worthiness on yours; and as far as I am able to judge, I do not think I have erred. The motive which prompted me to select you as a fitting boy for so high a distinction — remember, I may be placing the future welfare of the nation in your keeping — is my full conviction that you will be a credit to me, an honor to your country and yourself. See that you do not disappoint me."

Philip had some good and rare qualities, and one of the noblest now asserted itself.

"I can't accept your offer, sir, without first telling you that I never hesitated to play a trick on you when I could. It was I who stopped your water-pipes and overflowed the fountain. It was I who egged the chairman of the meeting when you spoke a few weeks ago in the village. And only yesterday I tore down your stone wall in digging out a chipmunk. But I'll go right *now* and put that up," said he, candidly confessing his faults as rapidly as he could bring them to mind, and starting for the door at the last, anxious to repair the wall on the instant.

"Stop a moment; not so fast," interrupted the member, hiding a smile at his impetuous desire to make all the reparation in his power. "I sent a man to fix the wall immediately after you left its vicinity, and perhaps that was the most lucky bit of deviltry you ever accomplished. What branch of the service do you prefer?" abruptly going back to the army again.

Phil paused, thoughtfully twisting back and forth the broken rim of his straw hat. Although he had never thought of it before, he felt it to be a very momentous question, and one not to be hastily answered. After carefully digesting it in all its bearings, he gravely replied:

"Well, sir, I am not much of a figure for the infantry, but on horseback, now, I'd do very well. Legs don't show

to much advantage in the saddle, and you are all right if the stirrups are short enough. I have read about these things, I know the drill. I've the regular army tactics at home. I think, considering I'm so top-heavy — can't see how my neck and legs forgot to grow, though — I'll aim for the cavalry, sir."

Again the member smiled. "You are high in your ideas, my boy."

"No higher than I can fly; all I want is a chance," confidently replied the lad.

"And are there no little playmates whom you will regret leaving behind?" asked Mr. Colburn, pointedly.

"Oh, no," said Phil; "no one that I care for."

"Why, what would your black-eyed Gypsy say, if she heard you utter such treason?"

Philip's countenance fell. Poor Gypsy! it would break her loving little heart. His own reproached him, that he should have forgotten her in his new aspirations. Lot Colburn's keen, steel-gray eyes were on his face, reading its varying expressions with unerring truth, and was pleased to see that he was not ashamed of the child-passion so beautifully illustrated under the hickory. The expression was wholly sorrowful. Most lads of his years would have been shy to acknowledge their affection for a little girl like Genie, but Phil was quite the contrary, and rather prided himself on Imogene's open preference for his ungainly self. If older people presumed to make comments, he scornfully let them pass, but punished this presumption in youths of his own age, by a sound hammering. Pooh! what did stout little Phil care. All the town was welcome to know that he liked Gypsy, and stood up for her like a hero on all occasions. He was one of those bold, impenetrable boys, on whom teasing and jeering is quite thrown away. As for laughing him out of anything, that was as useless as attempting to stare a stone out of countenance, and to the

juvenile portion of Alden extremely dangerous. The sorrowful look gradually died out of the face that Lot Colburn was studying in pleased surprise, and he said with slow distinctness:

"Yes; Gypsy will take on, but I can talk her out of it, for she is very fond of me."

"Oh," thought the grave man of the world, "how confident he is of his power. Already he knows how to use it over the heart that loves him best. I fear ambition will destroy his boy-love, and that is a sad, sad thing to think of. Even now he is planning in his mind how he will hush her tears and voice, and bend her sorrow to his will."

Philip broke in on his thoughts by remarking, apologetically, as if it were needful to excuse his treason toward Gypsy: "You know, sir, I could not stop just because a little girl cried and felt bad about my going."

"And who is the beautiful little girl I saw with you yesterday afternoon?"

"Her real name is Imogene Vale, but I call her Gypsy, 'cause she is so wild and dark. There ain't a girl in the village as can touch her for beauty, nor temper," he added, *sotto voce.* "She is the child of the English lady who died with the Lees two years ago."

"And *who* was she?"

Philip was amazed, the question seemed such a blank, unanswerable one, uttered in so direct a way by the searching voice of the Honorable Lot, that he was staggered for a moment, having an idea that he alluded to the lady's obscure antecedents; he replied, confusedly:

"I — I don't know, sir."

The words had scarcely passed his lips when from out the dim past arose the pale, reproachful face of Elinor, looking as it did the day he last kissed its chill whiteness. The memory of that thin, shrouded figure recalled his startled senses, and he quickly added:

"Why, she was Mrs. Vale — who else could she be?"

"And her daughter is still with the Lees?"

"Yes, sir, and treated every bit as well as Davie, and she 's their own girl, and all they have, too."

"Take my advice, Philip, and if this Gypsy is fond of you, keep her in your mind first of all. Her love will satisfy after all other things become stale. You needed it as a boy; you will need it more as a man." Lot Colburn sighed, and passed his hand across his brow, very much as if his heart were awearying of its ambition, and longing for a woman's love. Philip remained respectfully silent, furtively watching him from the corner of his eye, and vaguely wondering how he could ever repay his noble kindness.

"Yes, Philip, remember through all life's swift changes that star-eyed little Gypsy. That is all. You may go." He kindly held out his hand. Phil laid his brown paw in the soft, white palm, with a full, overrunning heart. "They call me a rough chap around here; but, sir, they have been rough to me; and, at my worst, no one can say I am *ungrateful.* I promised a woman, as is dead, that I would be kind to her little girl, and that 's why I stand up for Gypsy. Excepting *her* mother, and *you,* and Mrs. Lee, I can't recollect as ever anybody thought I was worth a kind word." He hesitated, the sweet undertone of his voice as tremulous as it was that day when he cried at Elinor's knee. Lot Colburn was deeply touched, and gently patted his head to hide his own emotion.

"There, don't thank me. I am but doing my duty. Do yours by me in return, and we are even. You have a heart that kindness can reach. I have great hopes of you. Come and see me when you please. I 'll always be glad to see you." He led him into the hall, and watched him bound down the marble steps, two at a time. Then he went back to his book, murmuring, as he turned over the

leaves, "I have this day given to America a famous general."

Phil glanced remorsefully at the fountain musically dropping its bright water into the marble basin, stopping a moment to look at the young girl, who, unconscious of his presence, was sitting in a rustic chair near by, listening to its soft murmur. The drooping boughs of the ornamental willow beneath which she reclined seemed swaying in time with the tinkling water-music. The steel-gray eyes of the watcher were fixed on the rising bubbles constantly forming and breaking on the surface. Ah, poor Olive Colburn, she had seen them so many times! A pair of silver-banded crutches leaning against the tree told their sad story. Philip only paused long enough to note that she was pale and slender, before bounding on again. His feet hardly touched the earth. A new world had dawned to his vision. The grand dream of his inmost being was to be a sublime reality. In fancy he had already fought a score of battles; and over the green hills came the roar of artillery, the rattle of infantry, and the dash of cavalry. Music, banners, glory, and victory whispered the splendor and triumph of war as he scampered through the buttercups and daisies of the meadow, speeding toward the Lees' in hot search of Gypsy. "Bah! Thad Ruggles might be a slow, plodding lawyer, and dig in everlasting sheepskin for a scant living, but he would carve out early fame and fortune with the sword!" so thought the eager boy. But above the smoke and din of his prospective glories, above the fire, and blood, and suffering of imaginary conflicts arose the young face of Imogene Vale, more beautiful from the confusion that surrounded it. Thus soon in his mind she was second to his ambition. Oh, pitiful thought, that he was rearing this grand chimera of future greatness above the love that was part of himself. He did not realize it then, and ran whistling and shouting on his way. "Why don't you

bark?" he cried to Hero, who had appeared at his heels the moment the gates of the Colburn estate were passed.

"Why don't you bark? That 's it, old fellow; wag your tail, for you 'll soon be done wagging it for me."

Then he clapped his hands and shouted until all the woods rang with the echo. Hero barked furiously in concert, leaping about in a frenzy of canine delight.

"Gypsy shan't say I slighted her this time, though I didn't intend to before. We never slight her; do we, Hero?" appealing to his dog for want of a better listener.

Meeting Thaddeus a few moments later, he could not refrain from imparting his good fortune to that serious and even-tempered young man, who, he was well aware, did not like him. But Thad was far from being a selfish person, and if it were really a benefit to Phil, he was heartily glad, and sincerely told him so; but once out of the boy's sight, he could not help asking himself, "Is Lot Colburn in his dótage?" For a quarter of an hour after parting with Thaddeus a crippled bat that he happened to spy clinging to a wayside tree claimed Phil's absorbing attention, and in the fun of making it "squeak" he alike forgot Imogene and that he was to be a West-Point cadet.

CHAPTER X.

CHILDHOOD'S PLEASANT DAYS ARE PAST.

"OH, dear!" cried Vida, bounding into the sitting-room, where Imogene sat pensively turning over the leaves of an old dog-eared history, that she had resuscitated from the rubbish in the garret, to more thoroughly acquaint herself with the duties and dangers of a soldier. Deeply interested, she had closely scanned the pictured battles from Lexington to Chapultepec, and had just arrived at the conclusion that it was a very wicked and precarious thing to be a soldier, when Davie burst in with her prefatory "Oh, dear!"

"What are you 'oh dearing' about?" asked Genie, without looking up.

"I guess you will 'oh dear' worse than I, when you come to know. I don't quite understand it, only Phil is going away to the school where they make soldiers. The very one where Lawrence Parker went. Oh, won't he look a guy in such tight gray clothes!" Imogene's tattered history fell to the floor unheeded, and springing up, she stood poised on one foot, the great eyes wild with apprehension. "Did he tell *you?*" she asked, the old sense of slight and jealousy uppermost.

"No; Thad told me. He met him in the lane, coming this way, to tell you, I suppose. Phil could n't rest without telling —" But Imogene was halfway to the gate, leaving Davie bereft-of a listener, and much hurt that Genie should scamper away bareheaded, and not allow her to finish the story. But careless of her abrupt departure, Imogene's black curls were flying down the lane, glistening like the wing of a

blackbird in the sunshine, repeating at every step, "He 'll tell me first — he is coming to tell me first."

Sure enough, there came Phil, skipping along as fast as his short legs could carry him. Under his hands the crippled bat had squeaked its last, and with the final motion of the ugly thing Philip bethought him of his mission to Gypsy, and immediately hurried on, doubling his speed, when he saw Genie coming as hard as she could run to meet him — the dark face glowing, and drops of perspiration standing thick on her brow and about her mouth. Reaching out her little arms to shorten the distance, when full two rods away, she cried, breathless from haste and excitement :

"Tell me it is not true that you are going away. Say it is not true."

"Oh, but it is, though," confirmed the boy, picking her up like a feather, and giving her a toss in the air. "I was coming to tell you. Let 's sit down here on this stone, and I 'll make it all as clear as noon. My, how warm you are! all in a drip — sweat as big as peas all over your face."

Philip wiped the sleeve of his linen jacket across her forehead several times, fanned her a few moments with his hat, leaning on his elbow and scraping the brim randomly about her neck and chin, all of which she seemed to endure in a most thankful spirit. After this gallant attention he proceeded to inform her, word for word, interspersed with copious comments, everything the Hon. Lot Colburn had said, winding up with, "Now, you be good, and grow as fast as you can, and I 'll take you with me when I am done with the school."

This Genie faithfully promised to do.

"But, Philip," she said, putting back her damp hair, the questioning dark eyes looking sadly at him, "the years will be so long — so long from Christmas to Christmas — so long from birthday to birthday. Oh, *so long* waiting for you."

The sadness of her words, touched all through with the sorrow of the child-voice, cast a dejected gloom over the boy, and for a moment the dazzling glories he was to win faded away, but revived in full force after a little pondering.

"I know you won't have any one that you like to hunt birds' nests and squirrels with, but every year you will care less for such things, so that 's not so much matter; and you know, Gypsy, if you are right fond of me you ought to be glad that I have so good a chance. They don't come every day, I can tell you. And I'll return so hunky that all the old Alden nincoms will stare their eyes out. But I hope to die if I don't always like you best of anybody, Gypsy."

This was Philip's *ne plus ultra* of a vow, and its terrible solemnity was deeply felt by the girl, who deemed it perfectly impossible for any one to live a moment after breaking so fearful an oath.

"I am glad that you are going to be so great, and that Mr. Colburn was kind to you, though it is dreadful to kill people that have never harmed you, and bury them in a ditch, and everything all blood and groans" — this was a mixed vision of the recent history in a high state of confusion — "but I shall be so lonely, and my heart is just breaking this minute." A great sob burst from the little bosom, and a torrent of tears rained into the neatly starched white apron in so reckless and ruinous a way that Hetty's careful soul would have been frantic at the wanton sight.

Philip thought of that day under the lilacs, and almost believed that the dead mother lay stark in the darkened parlor, and was being mourned anew. Resorting to the old remedy, he cuddled her down in his lap like a grieved baby, gently stroking her hair as it lay crushed against his stout breast, the pitying tenderness of his eyes and mouth wonderfully softening the hard austerity of the uncouth features. Brushing the fast flowing tears from her cheeks

with the back of his hand, pausing every second to perform the same service for himself individually, for the mist was so thick that he could not see without privately clearing his vision — whispering close to her ear, he went off on another tack, hoping to mend matters by a new version on the subject.

"You must not cry, or else I'll think you selfish, and don't care to have me get on in the world."

"Oh, don't say that, Phil, please don't. I can't bear you to think so mean of me, when it's all so very different," she sobbed, wounded at this reproach into a fiercer gust of sorrow.

"Well, I don't exactly mean selfish, I mean — no, I don't, either. You are the only one who will feel sorry at my going, because you are the only one who really loves me. I'll not scold you, or say you are selfish, when I know you are not, and you may cry it out now as you did when — when — she was dead. I don't mind telling you, for you never blab, even when you are mad, like most silly girls; but I've made up my mind to just take the rag off everything in the army, and lick everything I undertake to fight fair out of their boots. But if I should mention this — and, except you, it fills all my thinking room — to any of these old village gum-heads, they'd only laugh and poke fun at me; but you wait and see if I don't come out a trump, and make something howl before I am done. You are so pretty, Gypsy; and you will be prettier yet, when you are older. I never get tired of looking at you, though I do at most girls."

"And do you love me because I am pretty?" lifting her head in surprise, as if she had never thought of it before.

"Yes; part that, and part because you are Gypsy, and not like any of the others. And I have loved you ever since you were a crawling baby, no longer than my arm.

You are 'most nine. Why, you will be a woman when I return. Now say you are willing for me to go, and keep this kiss until I come back. You won't let anybody steal it?"

"No; I'll let no one touch me, and I'll be glad, if it will please you, Phil; but you know I can't get over the ache sudden," she said, regarding him wistfully with a long-drawn sigh.

Brave little heart! she was crushing all the grief outwardly, that she might please him, and seem proud and cheerful in his going away — thus early beginning a woman's mission of self-denial.

Two months later, they stood together in that selfsame spot, and uttered the good-by that was to separate them for four long years. In her very childhood Imogene's life took up its burden of waiting. The one name, Philip, comprised the sum of existence to her. The world contained nothing else — the theme of all her thoughts — the impetus that chose and guided her studies. To excel in beauty and accomplishments beyond the most beautiful and accomplished of the village girls was her sole ambition. Not that she cared about it for herself, but for Philip's sake she was vain of the lovely face and precocious genius with which nature had richly endowed her; and the rare promise of splendid womanhood was cherished with secret delight, as another link binding her to him, and she watched her own graceful growth of stature and development of mind in eager anxiety.

Philip fairly established at West Point, she went back to her books with fresh zeal. He should not find her a dullard, a tame, insipid country-girl, ignorant of the better music and poetry of life. If he advanced ever so rapidly, he should see that she, in a womanly way, could keep pace in the progressive and intellectual race that marked the sphere of each. Lessons that racked poor

Davie's brain to woful sighs and tears, were readily mastered by Imogene, who was immensely her superior in matters which required quick mental activity, and rapidly and easily left her far behind in school honors. But Davie was not jealous nor envious; for was not Genie always willing to help her out in her lessons, and explain the nature of those perplexing compound fractions that were too hard for anything? and it was so nice to have such a clever and obliging sister.

In the late autumn of this same year, Davie had her first grief. Thaddeus was going away to Oregon, a then almost unknown wilderness; and in her gentle, patient, indemonstrable manner, this was a great trial to genial, even-tempered Davie.

From her birth, sober-visaged Thad had been her brother, companion, and lawgiver. She was the apple of his eye, deep-fixed, and silently worshipped below everything else in his heart. But no one knew this; he hardly knew it himself: she was his sister, and as such obeyed and adored him as a matter of course, and as all good little sisters should a tall, severe-eyed, older brother.

As he was going early in the morning, he bade the children good-by the evening before. He said good-night to Imogene in the usual indifferent custom, and she nodded back a careless reply; but halfway up the stairs she thought better of it, and, returning, she went up to him as he sat with Davie drowsily whimpering on his knee, and looking up in that solemn, penetrating manner peculiar to her when deeply earnest, she said, "Good-by, Thaddeus, and in all the future — success!"

"Thank you, Imogene," replied Thaddeus, surprised at the fervor of her tone. "I shall miss your bright face in the new, strange land. Here is good-by to you from an ardent heart." He would have kissed her, but she drew hastily away. "Now I can't; I promised" — she hesitated,

as if she was betraying a sacred confidence, and gave him her hand instead, tossing back a kiss from the tips of her fingers as she left the room. Davie mustered a woebegone smile at Genie's funny way of bidding him farewell, and immediately went to feeling very bad again. She had cried by fits all the afternoon, and was dreadful tired and sleepy, and she tucked her face under his arm in the old baby fashion, and sniffled herself into silence. The light, melancholy pats he unconsciously bestowed on her plump little shoulder soothed the last vestige of grief; and when Thaddeus, who had been turning over in his mind the most consoling method of saying the final adieu — he was not a natural comforter like Philip — lifted the drooping head, she was fast asleep. "She could not keep awake, poor lamb, and it makes the parting easy. I'll carry her up to bed, as I have done so many times. Ah, when will she fall asleep in my arms again?" thought Thaddeus.

Mrs. Lee came in with eyes that spoke of recent weeping. Laying her hand affectionately on his shoulder, she said, "I cannot realize that this is your last night under the old roof."

"Don't, mother. I'll come back an honor and a blessing to you, my more than mother; and I pray you not to make this sad hour sadder by your tears that will not avail. I'll live but to do my duty to you and God."

"Heaven grant it?" Her trembling hand went from his thick auburn locks to Davie's sunny hair; then she kissed them both, whispered "God keep my children," and went softly out. Thaddeus, clasping close his loved burden, disappeared up the narrow stairway. Tenderly laying the slumbering child on the bed, he bent over her, kissing lips and brow; a suppressed groan followed, and falling on his knees, he prayed, "God's best blessings on thee, my fair, darling little sister." Davie turned her cheek to the pillow, and gave a half-sighing breath, indicative of sound sleep.

She was unconscious of his anguish, but through the dim starlight gloom a pair of black eyes watched him from behind the door. Imogene noted his tearless sorrow, and vaguely thought, "Can this be staid old Thad making such a fuss over a little sleepy-head, who snores an accompaniment to his prayers?" She shrank among the shadows as he swiftly passed by, and then lightly tiptoed into the bedroom, which she had always shared with Davie. It was a neat, large chamber, facing the south and west, looking out over a broad expanse of hills and fields. The west window Davie kept curtained very close, for from it could be distantly seen the village grave-yard; of late it had been greatly beautified and improved, and was now known by the dignified name of Alden Cemetery. It was there Elinor lay buried, beside her little brother and sisters, and so Davie always avoided the window which reminded her of death. Imogene lifted the tabooed curtain, and by the feeble light bestowed a long look on oblivious little Vida. The scornful smile on her lips was as scornful as her words: "And so you can sleep like that, when Thaddeus is going with the coming day! You are not capable of much affection. I did not sleep so sound for weeks after Philip went away. I can't, even now; and lay awake, with my eyes wide open in the dark, thinking of him. Ah! Davie, darling, yours is a tender, passionless, *forgetting* heart."

In the indistinct dawn of the morning a black, curly head might have been seen peeping from behind the muslin curtain, the bright sleepless eyes on the alert for the stage that was to bear away Thaddeus to years of wandering, toil, and absence; but the blonde tresses of Davie still lay sweetly reposing on the pillow. Imogene's dark face was almost contemptuous in the gray, uncertain light. "He loves you, Vida Lee, and you pretend to adore him, yet you sleep, when *my* eyes will not close, and I do not, nor never have loved him; but he was part of my home-life

here, and its breaking pulls at my heart. You will cry after breakfast, when you find him gone — you will be too drowsy before — and then coax me to play with your rag dolls. I hate scratchy-faced dolls, and their silly tea-sets, and everything that is a mimic of something real."

Before the first letter arrived from Thaddeus, Davie had recovered from the loneliness of his absence, and was as merry as a cricket, much to Genie's silent disgust. Notwithstanding, his memory was still dearly cherished, for she would purloin the letters from her mother's work-box, and spend hours in making out the hard words, gravely appealing to Genie for a solution of the extra-complicated sentences. Dear little, single-minded Davie! she was born for the sunshine; why should she be expected to pass through Imogene's darkling shadows?

CHAPTER XI.

AFTER A TIME.

ANY one who had seen the Lee homestead fifteen years before, could scarcely believe that it was the same dwelling. The old house remained just the same, but a great renovation had taken place within. The metamorphosis was not so general in the sitting-room and upper regions, but in the parlor it was triumphant. There the plain, clumsy furniture had given way entirely. The old-fashioned chairs and ponderous sofa had been superseded by light, modern upholstery, and the once sacred "best things" were ingeniously scattered, never to stand again in rigid pomp in the best room.

Many elegant feminine trifles, arranged in nooks and

corners, pointed to deft, artistic fingers other than Ruth's or Hetty's. The blossoming plants in the sunny south window were not there when we last saw the quaint old sitting-room. The new reign brought them, as well as the velvet-voiced canary, singing in his gilded cage, hopping from perch to seed-cup, with a twittering song that merged into a clear warble when his young mistress came to give him a gay good-day. Then there was any number of cunningly made tidies, mats, and the like. Wax flowers and burr frames were also conspicuous, with ingenious bits of shell-work, and a marvel in the way of a sofa-pillow, made from infinitesimal scraps of silk of every conceivable color, nicely joined together in a square, and stuffed out as plump as a Christmas turkey. But all this was nothing compared to the wonders wrought in the parlor. The homemade striped carpet had disappeared, and now a pretty ingrain sprinkled its roses over the floor. Lace curtains had supplanted the common green-paper shades that used to be rolled up with a cotton string, finished with a glaring white tassel of Hetty's modest manufacture, which probably accounted for its scrimp and fuzzy appearance. And there in the corner, where Elinor Vale had lain through the holy time between death and the waiting grave, stood a handsome rosewood piano.

In speaking of this last extravagance, David had contentedly remarked: "Well, well; I am prosperous, and can afford it. The girls, Lord bless 'em! begged it out of me; and then the carpet and chairs and curtains would n't do; and then the whitewashed walls and lumbering old sofa was no match; and as I 'd not like a tumble-down old shed next to my new barn, I gave in. They trundled *out* the spinning-wheel and trundled *in* the piano. It was kind o' tough to see the old thing go. But the girls must advance with the times — things are different since Ruth's day — and we can't expect it of the young folks; and it

mightily pleases women to fix up in-doors. I'd affection for the stiff, grim old traps of sixty years ago, because they were familiar with my mother's face, and the pride she took in dusting and arranging them was touching. But for that, I vow I believe I'd like these new, light, airy ones best. I don't farm as my father did. No, no; I improve my stock and land according to science and progression, and why should n't my women-folks improve and modernize their house?"

Sound logic in David, for which all the "women-folks" of his domicil rewarded him by a score of hugs and thanks.

A delicious summer twilight, blending daylight with moonlight so slowly that you hardly knew when the one departed and the other came, only there, over the treetops, peeps the young moon, and the west yet reflecting the red and gold of the vanished sun — a pensive hour, when our hearts go naturally heavenward, and the Father's love draws very near; when the vexations and toil of the day fade into tranquil peace and rest, and the light and shade of the landscape is but a reflex of our nature. It was on such an hour and evening that any one passing the Lee farm-house might have seen seated at the piano a young girl, darkly handsome, with lustrous black eyes, and a midnight wealth of curling hair. Imogene Vale had more than fulfilled the promise of her childhood. Beautiful and gifted to a degree that astonished everybody, she was the best pupil in Alden's superior academy, but not the best loved; she was too haughty and reserved for that, and carried off class prizes and school honors in proud silence. Confident of her own ability, and caring for nothing but her own thoughts, she lavished no affection on her schoolmates and indulged in no school-girl raptures. She had no bosom friends and confidants, like Davie; no daily kisses, and hugs, and secrets; no pets and pouts; no strong likes and dislikes. She was free from the thousand and one griefs

and joys of school. Her music was the grand passion of her being, and how to gratify it a study that at first baffled her ingenuity to surmount. But she conquered it by going straight to Ruth and David, imploring, with the eloquent tears filling the proud eyes that were not wont to weep, that they would give her an opportunity and aid her to cultivate the talent which was all she had to look to should she ever be forced to earn her own living. Her voice and musical genius were her fortune, and if now improved she could repay it all in the future. David scouted the last proposition, and took time to consider regarding the first. But Ruth readily agreed, and Davie joined in the entreaty. The trio were too much for him, he succumbed, and a fine instrument was the result of their combined power.

This was the true secret of the piano, the advent of which turned out the old furniture, and sent Ruth out in search of a competent music-teacher. Imogene's improvement was sure and rapid. At early daylight and dusky evening, hour after hour she would patiently practise; the more the difficulties the more she bent every energy to overcome them. Vida surprised herself, and everybody else, by mastering sharps and flats after a deal of hammering, drumming at scales, and writhing under time and measure with a persevering zeal quite remarkable for her. Without a teacher Imogene had taken up French. The language came to her like a mother-tongue, and her well-worn French grammar and lexicon were conned over with an unflagging determination to conquer. All day and half the night she pored over her books, Ruth's gentle chiding eliciting only a pleading "Oh, auntie, I cannot live without my books. I am not injuring my health; much sleep is not natural to me, and much study is. If I can obtain a good education I'll be ready armed to meet the world. I'm but a waif, aunt; I never forget that, though you are so kind and loving." What could Mrs. Lee do but turn away in

silence, and let the spirit that created feed the fire until satisfied.

It would be hard to tell of what Imogene was thinking as she sat at the piano, her hands idly running over the keys, bringing out little throbs of random music — fragments of tunes, just as they chanced to drift through her mind. The moon, hanging full over the maples, threw a long rift of soft, moving light on the carpet. Davie, sitting in the doorway, bathed in its mellow beams, was quite unconscious of how sweet a picture she was making. It was very quiet, only the broken music pulsing out irregularly, and a quivering tremor of the leaves bending to shelter some gray little bird that had forgotten its bedtime.

With head leaned back and hands listlessly folded, Vida sat dreamily listening. Presently a flood of music, sad and low, sobbed from the instrument. The melody was so utterly sad that the tears sprang unbidden to Davie's blue eyes.

"What is that — I never heard you play it before?" she asked, when the last note died away.

"I don't know," said the player. "It just came into my mind; impromptu, nothing more."

"It is a sorrowful thing," said Davie, wiping her eyes. "It brought the tears without my knowing it. I will call it 'The Parting.'"

"And this, then, shall be 'The Meeting.'" Imogene began a brilliant medley, gay, joyous, and full of laughter, as mirthful as the other was sad; after which she seated herself on the sill beside Davie.

"I wish I could play like you, Genie. I wonder how you contrive to put so much language into your playing. You make the piano laugh and cry and talk as suits your pleasure."

"Oh, it 's my gift; nature could not be quite a churl and deny me *everything*. I am sure you get on nicely."

"Oh, I can't play anything but what is set for me, and not that without a deal of wearying practice," complained Davie.

Nothing could be more completely different than those two young creatures sitting in the doorway. Slim, graceful girls of fifteen, standing on the verge of beautiful womanhood, eagerly meeting the years as they passed, and longing to embrace full maturity, careless of the troubles and anxieties it brought in its train. The one happy and living in the present; the other earnest, and looking to the future. Imogene, with her richly stored and mature mind, might to have been twenty, and Davie ten, so far was the one in advance of the other. Genie, poor child! was largely gifted, full of high-strung passions and lofty pride. The petty tempers, vindictiveness, and self-will of childhood were laid aside, or controlled by a gentler, more womanly spirit, but the old nature still smouldered deep underneath. Davie could never admire her enough, and was everlastingly praising her to all her friends, for she was so like the gorgeous picture of an Eastern princess she once saw, and carried her beauty and accomplishments royally.

Imogene was, indeed, gorgeously lovely — such a rare, splendid face, dark, sparkling, and intellectual, as is seldom met with. And Davie was so fair: yellow braids, and violet-blue eyes, thousands like it, shelly-cheeked, dimple-chinned, pretty, pink, and waxen, commonplace doll beauty — that was lovable little Davy. Her face never knew anger or frowns; merry from morning till night, she danced about gay as a lark. Smiles, sunshine, and gladness followed her footsteps. Nothing troubled her; nothing put her out. No fretting, sulks, nor temper marred her existence. She managed to get all the sweets of life, leaving the bitter for other cups.

A loving, good-natured creature was Davie, and sitting on the door-sill she looked it without being told. Twisting

her fingers in Genie's heavy curls, she remarked, laughingly:

"I suppose to-morrow must be marked with a white stone, for Phil Shirley — I beg pardon — Lieutenant Shirley is coming. Susie Johnson is just wild, and says he has graduated with the highest honors, and that she always did like him."

"I am very certain *he* never liked *her*," said Genie, tartly.

"No, indeed; and Susie does fib so. My! I'd be afraid to say my prayers if I told such stories as she makes nothing of telling," said Davie, piously lifting her eyes. "But it is true about his graduating! Who would have believed it of our ragged, saucy Phil?"

"I would," was the terse reply.

"I wonder how he will look, and if he will remember us? Such inseparable chums as you were, and how he used to domineer over you!" went on Davie. "He petted and liked you best, though. I wonder if he will remember it?"

"He will remember," said Imogene. "I *know* he will remember."

For weeks she had counted the days that would bring the last of September and Philip! She lay awake thinking of him half the night, and all day she had wandered about restlessly waiting the morrow. Davie saw nothing unusual in her manner, however. Happy creature! her mind was too careless, too thoughtlessly simple to penetrate the outer mask. Imogene's face never betrayed her heart, and its secret promptings were hidden deeper than much keener eyes could fathom. It was the old, open child-love, intensified by years of silent brooding into a strange, sacred sort of passion, that was like a solemn trust which she was set to keep and guard from the unsympathizing curious with jealous care. It was the centre of her being, to which

every other impulse of her nature became subservient, and where her higher and better thoughts and hopes tenaciously clung, resolving into a species of ideal worship—a dream, which, rudely broken, might startle the young heart from its girlish lethargy into a fierce latency of rage and despair. She had never doubted Philip's fidelity, and though she answered Davie's questions laconically, they did not give her the least disquiet; only it was annoying to have that hateful Susie Johnson say *she* liked him, now that he was coming home a genteel lieutenant of the regular army. David Lee's strong voice, sounding from the damp vicinity of the well, interrupted her thoughts:

"Come, girls, give us a song. I am bound to have my share out of your music-box." His heavy tread cut the dew from the grass, leaving a line like a swath in his wake. Planting himself in the easiest chair, he pinched Davie's dimpled chin, and pulled Genie's glossy curls, one standing on either side, to more effectually enforce his request. With his old hat pushed back and his shirt-sleeves rolled up, he threw a brown, muscular arm about either slight waist, and, lifting them bodily, carried them across the room and set them down at the piano. "There, now, give us one of your best duets." Laughing, the girls obeyed, and rattled off one of their very liveliest double compositions.

"There, that's jolly," encored David, keeping time with his foot. "Now, Yankee-doodle; none of your operas and sentimentals for me." Davie protested she never could infuse the right spirit into Yankee-doodle, and Imogene was obliged to undertake it. The old air was too much for the highly appreciating farmer, and he vigorously beat time with hand and foot, whistling a shrill, flute-like accompaniment to relieve his excess of delight. The moment the song ended, Davie perched herself on his knee. "Oh, you dear old daddy, haven't you a rare taste for grand music?

Here comes mamma to laugh at you." Kind, brown-eyed Ruth, just as light of step and tender of heart as when we saw her last, a few silver threads in the smooth, brown hair, but soft and plentiful as of yore. Imogene turned around on the music-stool and looked at the three attentively. As she had grown older and more manageable, David had become fonder of her, and was never quite satisfied if her shy endearments did not come with Davie's plenteous hugs; and he now motioned her to a seat on his unoccupied knee. She readily complied, sitting straight and mute, leaving the talk and frolic to her *vis-à-vis* Davie.

"Bless us, Ruthie, what two big girls we are getting!" he said, playfully turning to his wife. "We will soon have a plenty of beaus sneaking about," trotting them up and down, as he uttered the soft insinuation.

"I trust it will be a long time, David, before our daughters trouble their little heads about beaus," replied Ruth, patting first one and then the other.

"Phil Shirley is coming home to-morrow, and he is quite a gentleman now, vastly improved I hear; and I am going to coax something out of you, papa," solemnly imparted Davie.

"Out of me! Oh, you witch! you are always coaxing something out of me. What is it?"

"A *party;*" a great gravity of emphasis on the last word, followed by a startled pause. "Yes, a party in honor of Philip. He is to remain until after the holidays, and we will have lots of time to think and fix for it. *I* 've been thinking about it this long while. Oh, Genie, was n't I clever for once?" leaning across to kiss her.

David was astounded.

"Well, mother, did you ever hear the like? I told you so, beaus and parties always come together; and what says black-eyes to a party?"

"I should enjoy it very much, uncle," said Genie, sink-

ing her head to his broad shoulder, and bestowing a commending look on Davie.

"And blue-eyes conceived this brilliant idea all alone, did she?" giving her a fond squeeze. "I say, mother, it would be a pity to have such a grand plan come to nought for lack of our consent: suppose we sanction it."

"I am willing," said Ruth, smiling into the eyes of her kind, big-hearted spouse.

"Oh, I knew you would, you dear, best old papa," cried Davie, in a tremor of delight, burying her pretty nose in his limp shirt-collar, by way of expressing her unbounded thanks.

"Ah, wife, these teasing girls are the very plague for having their way. There, be off with you. You have made me forget that I have a letter in my pocket from Thad," unceremoniously shaking the girls from their comfortable seats, and drawing forth the letter. "Here, wife, I've read it. He'll be with us at Christmas, God willing."

"Oh, glorious!" broke in Davie, skipping about gleefully. "Then we will have a double party — extra nice in *his* honor. Oh, don't I wish I was two months older!"

"What a mad-cap it is! But he is doing well, and becoming a wonder for law and learning; you should be proud of him, Davie."

"So I am, papa, and will give him half of my party. That is generous, I am sure." David laughed, and went out with Ruth to have another perusal of the letter.

The party pleased Imogene more than she cared to admit — it was so novel and fresh she liked it — and petted Davie a great deal more than usual in consequence.

CHAPTER XII.

OLIVE.

AGAIN we find Lot Colburn seated in his handsome library, and Sam announces "A gentleman to see you, sir," obsequiously showing in a short, stout gentleman in the uniform of the regular army.

"Young Shirley, as I live!" cried Mr. Colburn, grasping him by both hands. "I am more than glad to see you. This is my daughter, Olive."

A small figure, in a recumbent attitude on the sofa, without moving from her seeming indolent position, held out a feeble little hand that Philip was half afraid to touch, and said in a faint, sickly voice:

"I am very glad to meet you. You will forgive my not rising."

She glanced with a sad, flitting blush at the crutch leaning against the arm of the sofa. He bowed, murmured something about not wishing to disturb her, and took a seat.

It was our old friend Phil Shirley, but how changed! Fastidiously neat in dress, the trim uniform became him well. He had acquired a quick military step, which just suited his short stature, and dissipated the clumsiness which his heavy shoulders might have suggested to an obtuse observer.

Leaning his elbow on the table, Lot Colburn regarded him attentively, greatly pleased at the marked improvement of his *protégé*. Lieutenant Shirley had attained the ease and bearing of a well-bred gentleman during his absence, as well as the first honors of his class, and Lot was naturally very proud of his advancement.

"You have done well; I am proud of you, Philip."

"Thank you, sir. I have tried to merit your approbation. I have won West Point's best distinctions, and came direct to tell you so."

"Just arrived, eh?"

"This moment, sir. I have not been home yet. My first duty and thanks belong to you. I have never forgotten the generous kindness that gave me a fair start."

"Now I'll have no thanks. Why, I'll live to see you a splendid credit to my discernment," hastily remarked Mr. Colburn, anxious to avoid the expression of Philip's grateful feelings.

A few moments later he rose to go. Approaching the sofa, he bade Olive good-by. In conversing with Mr. Colburn he had entirely overlooked her. The daughter, not sharing his gratitude with the father, was quite neglected.

"Come often," she said, lifting her eyes timidly, a slight color suffusing her infantile face. "I care to meet but few. You are one of the few."

"A favor of which I shall avail myself."

He pressed the little soft hand and went out. Scarcely were his quick, eager footsteps clear of the hall than Olive limped over to her father.

"You did a good, noble deed there, papa. Let me thank you," kissing him tenderly.

"He is a promising youth, and has the making of a fine officer about him. I saw that long ago. I am glad my shy little daughter has taken a fancy to him."

Olive's little crooked body held a woman's young, loving heart. Did Lot Colburn think of it, that he sighed and looked at her so pityingly?

"I can hardly realize that our gentlemanly lieutenant is the same shrewd scamp of a boy that Sam disparagingly introduced to my unasked acquaintance four years ago. Ah, time works wonders!"

"But not with with me, father; *I* shall always be lame,

sickly-faced Olive," she replied, mournfully contemplating her withered form.

Who would have thought the small, helpless creature a woman of twenty-one painful years? Hair of chestnut hue, braided away from a white, smooth brow; steely-blue gray eyes, like her father's, only more spiritual; lips and cheeks pale as fading lilies. Transparent skin, under-traced by a network of minute blue veins from chin to temples, served to render the white face whiter still. The habitual sorrowful expression of her eyes and mouth made her smiles sad as weeping, and her gayest moments suggestive of tears. It haunted Philip, even after leaving its presence, and all the more ardently he longed to see the sparkling face of his boy-love, Gypsy.

"Thank heaven, there are bright eyes and blooming cheeks in the world. These pale, weak, drooping women are not to my liking. Faces like wax, and hands that crumple in your grasp like wet paper — ugh! Poor Olive! and she is Lot Colburn's only child!"

Thus cogitating, Philip turned into the familiar fields, making for Mr. Lee's well-remembered lane. There it was, stretching its green, winding length along between the high stone walls that fenced it in from the fine lands lying shorn of their rich harvest on either hand. There was the button-ball-tree in the angle; the dwarfed crab-apple and wild-cherry a little farther on; the three stately elms this side the row of tall, half-dead poplars; and one lone, old oak, with its trunk close against the wall; — the grassy cart-track and the distinct, separate path, where the cattle came down to drink from the brook gurgling through the wall into the stone basin, bottomed with white pebbles, and cool and mossy where it trickled over the edge. Frogs used to abound there. Genie had helped to catch them. How everything spoke of her! Leading her by the hand, they had tramped through the woods and field and meadows,

coming tired and warm to rest under the trees in the lane. Every stone, and leaf, and wild-flower uttered her name. He was living the past over again, and she completely filled it. Even the milk-weed pods he saw along the way reminded him of yellow-jacket traps, and how one stung her twice on the hand: though she quivered with pain, she would not cry, but, twisting her little fingers for very aching, she had looked up in loving confidence when he put a plentiful supply of mud on the wound, which took away the pain right soon. He had assured her that soft, cool mud was an infallible remedy for the worst of bee-stings, and applied the lotion without stint, she humbly holding out her hand at arm's length, the better to facilitate his kind attentions. Philip folded his arms by the dripping water, half believing that Gypsy was bending over the margin, her bright face reflected in the shady pool, and he standing ankle-deep in the overflow losing itself in the trampled grass and soggy turf at the base.

For the time, the young officer was a merry, barefoot boy, free from the ambition which was fast obliterating the past happy days, and filling the future with dazzling schemes of power and greatness.

Boyhood came back with boyhood's scenes and memories, and in reviewing the old landmarks and the old love he forgot that he had started to call on the Lees, and sat down at the foot of a tree and listened to a bluebird singing over-head for an hour: then he sauntered on, heedless that the afternoon was waning, and Imogene yet unaware of his arrival. She was in his thoughts though, and perhaps it was as well that he lingered long in the lane recalling the face of his beautiful child-playmate before meeting it with a blank of years between.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN THE LANE.

IMOGENE thought that the day which was to bring Philip was never so tardy in dawning. The first golden ray found her up, and impatiently wishing it were noon instead of sunrise. Dinner over, she spent an hour in practising. Two o'clock, but he had not arrived. Three; yet no Philip. Would he never come? Her restless, watching heart began to fear. What had detained him? Judging his devotion by her own, she never once thought but what his first visit would be to her, and her eyes ached from gazing up and down the road. He might come from any direction. She looked across to the side-hill and over toward the corn-lot, but no Philip appeared. The in-door air oppressed her; she could endure it no longer, and stifling under the bitter disappointment, she caught up her hat and stole out—she did not care where, only to be alone. It was green and inviting in the lane; no one would trouble her there; and thither she bent her steps, crouching down at the foot of the oak where the crippled bat had surrendered its miserable existence. She threw off her hat. The wind, lightly stirring the massy black hair, kept the shadow of the oak-leaves dancing over her head in elfin sport. Eyes gazing nowhere and hands idly clasped, she sat rapt and motionless, unmindful of the whistling blackbirds in the meadow, or the mournful cooing of a ringdove desolately calling from the distant wood.

"Gypsy!" The voice went through her like an electric shock.

"Phil!" Her heart was in the name. The youth knew

it, and took her in his arms as if it were only yesterday that they parted.

"Have I changed much?" he asked, after making several desperate efforts to speak.

"Very little, only older in the face, and a mite taller. Your hands are not so brown, a something different in your voice, but your look is just the same. Are you glad to see me, Philip?"

"Glad!" His eyes answered the question more eloquently than words. "Glad to see you, Gypsy, when I have thought of you every day!"

"Then you were like me. I've thought of nothing else."

"What a faithful, remembering Gypsy! Let us sit here in the shade and talk it all over. I was coming to see you, but I am better pleased to meet you here. Everything seems so associated with you hereabouts that they tempted me to loiter longer than I was aware. You are just my dear little Gypsy, but so much more handsome than I ever thought womankind could be."

With his fingers tangled in her hair, and her head against his arm, Philip was fondling the slim young girl as he had fondled and petted the wayward child — she, as then, mute and still, with the large, dark eyes uplifted, so happy that her heart was one beat of joy. The one blissful moment repaid the years of waiting. She forgot that she stood on the threshold of womanhood, and that Philip was no longer a boy. She forgot all that she should have remembered, and remembered all that she should have forgotten; and with her hands folded in the old trustful way on his knee, she was looking worshippingly in his face, a smile in the lifted eyes, and every feature radiant with the delight of his presence. After all, they were merely boy and girl, incapable of sound reflection or a proper analyzing of their immature feelings. What did either of

them know or care for matter-of-fact reasoning? That would do for cold-blooded Thaddeus, but not for impetuous, ardent-hearted Philip, or fervent, passionate-natured Imogene. You may be sure *he* did not stop to consider; on the contrary, he pressed her forehead against his chin, like one who possessed a perfect right. Oh, happy, thoughtless, believing youth! beautiful, piteous love of fifteen, what do ye know of life? What do ye know of the world? of yourselves? of anything? But what is the use of moralizing? They loved each other, and that comprised their world.

"I left a kiss on your lips when I went away. Is it there yet?"

"It was until a moment ago," she replied, roguishly.

This satisfied him, and he began to relate his school exploits, detailing the locality of the drill-grounds, the rigid discipline, the limited rations, and the mysteries of Benny Haven's, with great exactness and gusto. All of which impressed his attentive listener with the idea that he had been the victim of authorized West-Point martyrdom.

"I am not quite stupid," she thought, "but I'll keep it to myself, and astonish him by what I have learned in his absence."

"We must be going," he said, rising. "I have not been home yet. I called on Mr. Colburn. You know I owe it to him," noting the shadow that flitted over her face. "I would not be ungrateful, and you are not going to feel slighted and jealous because you were not the first to see me, for I always keep the best till the last. But if I thought you really were, I'd make you own up, although you are tall and slender, and in long dresses." She laughed, and picked up her hat. "Upon my life, you are a young lady. I declare I never thought of it before. I suppose I ought to call you Miss Vale, but I fear I will never get any higher than Gypsy."

"And, if I see aright, you are a smart young officer. I suppose I ought to call you Lieutenant Shirley; but I fear I will never get any higher than Phil. So much for our dignity!" she retorted, walking demurely by his side. Hand in hand they went along, confident that they were the happiest mortals in existence.

"I'll come up this evening," he said, letting down the bars for her to pass through.

"Yes, do; and I'll mention to no one that I have seen you. It will so surprise Davie," she replied, bowing gravely in mock adieu.

"Of all the women that ever lived, you are the most beautiful and constant," apostrophized Philip, looking after her. "Such affection and perfect devotedness comes to the most love-favored man but once in a lifetime; and I, being so ill-featured and ungainly, will never win its like again, and I'll take care to possess it entirely, but—" He did not finish the sentence, walking swiftly in the opposite direction, with something resembling a frown on his brow.

Imogene ran into the sitting-room flushed and bright-eyed.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Davie. "How rosy you are; one might take you for a peony in full bloom. Where have you been hiding? I've been moping all the afternoon, dull as a wet Sunday, for lack of some one to talk to. I wanted to consult you about my new dress. I am such a rag in anything but white and blue, that I suppose I will have to submit to the old colors. I mean to astonish Phil, and shall have it made especially for that purpose."

"Oh, you vanity! I am not going to bother about my dress for him or anybody else," said Genie, affecting an immense air of indifference.

"Who knows but he will be so proud and airish that he will not deign to look at humble you and I?"

"Don't alarm yourself. He will be Phil Shirley, and nothing else," assured Genie; and, in the exuberance of her new joy, she caught the doubting Davie around the waist and went waltzing about the room in such a mad transport of spirits that her companion could not speak for amazement, though she joined in her unusual mirth with great zest. Ignorant, however, of its source, she put it down to one of Imogene's inexplicable flights, which she never ventured to question.

"There, I am quite out of breath," said Davie, dizzily, shaking her head. "And if this worshipful Philip should happen to call this evening, the honor would sanction our arraying ourselves in our most becoming attire. Honor the brave, say I, and here goes."

She flew out of the room, and up stairs like a bird, intent on donning the best dress for the young officer's benefit.

What was doubt to Davie, was certainty to Genie, and when Hetty announced in a loud whisper from the foot of the stairs, "He's come," she was not a bit surprised, although the information, obscure as it was, threw Davie into a flutter of excitement, and she ran to meet him without stopping for her serenely composed companion to pin the last ribbon in place. But, on seeing the spruce cadet, so different from the Phil of other days, she immediately recollected her manners, sedately held out her hand, remarking politely, "I am happy to welcome you home again, Lieutenant Shirley."

"None of that, Miss Lee! Nonsense, Davie! I am scapegrace Phil, and have pulled your nose a hundred times. There, Miss, that is for your impudence!" He gave her a kiss that Hetty might have heard in the kitchen if she had not at the moment been scouring a saucepan. She blushed, and laughed, and pushed Imogene, who had seen the performance from the open door as she was enter-

ing, toward him, merrily vowing that his loyal kisses belonged there, if anywhere.

Genie smiled, lightly laid her hand on his arm, and quietly explained: "I have seen Philip before, to-day!"

"Oh, you have!" rejoined Davie. "Then *I* cannot boast the *first* kiss after all. How provoking! and you two deceitful things, to steal such a march on poor, credulous I. But I was born to be wronged," trying to look injured.

"You need not fear Davie's anger, despite the fact that she is making a desperate attempt to appear stern and relentless; I never saw her angry in my life. She lacks the nerve and energy to get up a genuine fit of temper, had she the will," teased Imogene.

"I wish I could say the same of you," retorted Davie; "I have no doubt but Phil remembers your tantrums. But it is not for *me* to recall your faults," contemplating the floor, in so comically serious a manner that Philip burst out laughing.

What a happy evening it was, and how soon it passed! Ten o'clock came before they were aware, and the last chime reminded Philip that he must be going homeward. They both stood in the doorway and watched his departure in silence. His footsteps died away, leaving nothing but his low, musical whistle on the air. Fainter and fainter it came back on the breeze, and when lost in the distance, Davie said impulsively:

"I hate a random whistle, but there always was a certain melody about Phil's that was not altogether ear-piercing; some whistlers put my teeth on edge with their everlasting grating, but I can endure Philip's. Is it not too bad that he must be sent off to those grim old frontier forts? Such a nice, good fellow to be sacrificed for border duty. It 's a shame of the Government, when he is such clever, gallant company."

Imogene was thoughtful, replying, as she went up stairs, more to herself than to Davie:

"He goes immediately after the holidays, and the post assigned him is in the far interior of Arizona, miles and miles remote from even the rudest civilization." The thought kept her awake a long time after Davie fell asleep. Thus the brightest day of Imogene's young life had its shadow.

CHAPTER XIV.

UNDER THE WILLOW.

ALTHOUGH Philip passed a considerable portion of his time with the Lees, ostensibly as a general caller, but in reality Imogene was the sole attraction, he was also a frequent and privileged visitor at Mr. Colburn's. Calling, one afternoon, the servant informed him that his master was out, but Miss Olive was in the drawing-room; would Lieutenant Shirley see her? A *tête-à-tête* with the feeble daughter of his benefactor was not especially agreeable to Philip; nevertheless he signified his readiness to wait on Miss Colburn.

He found her supinely resting among a pile of cushions on the sofa, languid in manner and emaciated in looks. But her mind was not so barren as one, remembering her affliction, would have thought. She conversed well, and on this occasion tried to be cheerful and interesting. She succeeded so admirably that her visitor, who never liked remaining in-doors more than fifteen minutes consecutively, forgetting her infirmity, unthinkingly suggested a walk about the grounds. A quick, pained look reminded him of his blunder.

"I am sure you would not jest on such a topic," she said, the color mounting to her brow.

Philip proved equal to the emergency; banishing the momentary embarrassment, he resumed:

"Jest? certainly not. Let me ring for your hat. I have a stout arm, Miss Colburn. It is at your service, and shall do duty instead of this," touching the crutch. "You should enjoy this splendid autumn weather — nothing like plenty of fresh air to uproot the lilies and plant roses in cheeks so white as yours. Ah, here is your hat; let me tie it on; I am famous at such matters. I was a treasure among the girls when I was a boy for my dexterity in pinning up unfortunate rents, fastening buttonless aprons, repairing broken shoe-laces, and getting hard knots out of bonnet-strings; and, to convince you that I do not overrate myself, I will illustrate my ability. There; was not that neatly done?" He was so strong, self-confident, and withal so gentle, that she could not object. Abandoning the crutch to the loneliness of the great drawing-room, and leaning all her weight on his supporting arm, they passed out into the hall. But it was awkward going down the steps. Phil had no experience in escorting lame girls, and was fearful that an unlucky step might prove fatal. To avoid a mishap of the kind, he coolly picked her up, and never paused until he set her down on the rustic bench under the willow near the fountain. His unceremonious proceeding astonished her beyond expostulation, and she looked up half inquiringly, half gratefully. "I did not like to risk a fall," he apologized, seating himself beside her.

"I see you will get on in the world," she remarked, humorously; "for you shoulder your difficulties so bravely."

Philip smiled — the wondrous gentle smile that used to subdue Imogene's most refractory tempers, and now fascinated her whole being. To Olive it seemed almost divine, and a new, sweet charm followed it, sending a flutter to her

heart such as had never troubled it before. Phil threw his cap on the grass, turned sideways in his seat to get the better view of his companion, observing, lightly, "Now I presume, Miss Colburn —"

"Pray don't," she interrupted; "please call me Olive. I am such a child in everything but age. Everybody humors me. Please let me be Olive to you."

"Well, then, Olive, I presume you think that I never saw you sitting here before?"

"It is a favorite resort of mine. It is quite possible for you to have seen me here. Did you?"

"Yes; the day your father booked me for West Point. You were staring straight at the fountain, fixed as a statue. I little imagined then that I would sit here with you, Olive and Philip to each other." He took her unresisting hand — it was no bigger than a child's — held it a moment, as if determining what it was made of, carefully turned it over, palm upward, and laid it gently in her lap again. Evidently he did not fancy the material, but, oh, how he pitied her! Her sensitive nature, rendered doubly sensitive by her sad misfortune, intuitively guessed his thoughts.

"It is a pitiful thing," looking down at the rejected hand; "pitiful, like the rest of me. Everybody pities me. Oh! I am tired of being forever pitied." Her eyes were full of tears. She dare not wink, lest they fall upon her cheeks, which would be another pitiable weakness.

Philip was bent on being cheerful, and hastened to reassure her.

"You are too severe on yourself. A little lameness is nothing. Why, I expect to go on crutches yet. Just fancy me with a cork leg or an ugly scar across my anything but handsome phiz, or both, perhaps."

"I should like you just the same."

Olive's voice was low, her eyes tender, the thin face lighted up, and during the sudden animation she was really

pretty — a tame, flitting prettiness, however, that a hundred faces might possess, without giving it a second glance or thought, as was the case with Philip. He noted it one moment, to forget it the next. The marble Naiads guarding the fountain would as soon have won his love. Yet he enjoyed idling there by the side of a refined, well-born girl, unconscious and indifferent alike as to what she thought of him. He was but a beardless boy, thoughtless and a little conceited, as the majority of boys are prone to be; thus for the same thing in different objects he was capable of a varied compassion. He would have twisted the head from a lame rat; a crippled dog or horse he would have tenderly cared for. A lame boy he would simply pass by as unworthy of notice; but for a lame girl, young and sad-voiced like Olive, he could feel a keen sympathy in a disjointed, easy way. Now his thoughts were divided between the gold fish sportively glancing about in the water, under the very nose of a dripping nymph with a shell, who seemed to be flirting with a vain Narcissus, stealthily peeping at his own image over the brink, life on the border, the unpleasantness of being a cripple, and Imogene — *she* was always present; and oblivious of Olive's nearness, he fell to picturing her face in the falling spray.

"Of what are you thinking?" asked his companion, noting his rapt gaze.

"Of something beautiful."

"Oh! then, it was not of *me*," she replied, in assumed lightness. "Do you love beautiful things?"

"Yes. Though blunt, rough, and uncouth myself, I can yet appreciate beauty in any form."

"Have you ever met many handsome women? I am told this place is poor in that respect," inquired Olive, vaguely wishing that his answer would be a negative.

Philip returned, enthusiastically, "I have met a few

handsome women, but the most perfectly beautiful girl in the world lives here in Alden."

"Who is she?" faintly queried Olive.

"Imogene Vale."

"A sweet name. Describe her to me."

"I don't think I can do her justice. I don't think anybody can, in words. I was just attempting to conjure up her semblance in the spray. Imagine a rather tall figure for its years — she is barely fifteen — slender, lithe, and graceful, quick and active as a startled deer;" — (Olive winced;)— "eyes black as night — full, deep, and lambent, changing with her thoughts, smiling, sparkling, humid, never the same, but the loveliest ever seen, no matter what the expression; lips like red roses an hour after parting from the stem, and cheeks that rival the roses, only the bloom comes and goes and melts into her chin, lurking healthfully about her mouth in a richer tide than elsewhere; and hair — I can't describe her hair — it is down to her waist, curly and soft as satin; it is wavy all around her forehead, and is never smooth, but always splendid. She is gifted, too — sings like a nightingale, and plays better than her teacher. I've known her since she was a foot long. If you never saw Gypsy, you never saw a beautiful girl in all your life, Olive."

"Gypsy?"

"Yes, I gave her the name, and never call her by any other. She has always been very fond of me," complacently informed Philip. The final confession did not serve to revive Olive's spirits. Its effect was directly opposite, and her heart felt like a lump of lead in her bosom. She could not explain the cause, but the world suddenly became utter darkness — spaceless chaos, in which only one living thing existed, and that was Imogene Vale. The strange confusion struck her dumb, blinded her vision, and, for the instant, paralyzed her heart. She looked blankly

at the water, and Philip amused himself by watching the gold fish, entirely innocent of the effect of his careless words.

Oh! content ye, Olive! A thousand times better your lame seclusion, than to possess the beauty and endure the fiery trials fate dealt out so liberally to Imogene. Don't envy her, for the furnace which tried her soul would have killed or maddened you outright!

Olive found her voice — the spell passed — she was again calm and patient. "Help me in, Philip; I am tired." She would not be carried this time, and hopped along by his side, avoiding as much as possible the use of his arm; but on coming to the steps the young officer persisted, disregarding her protestations, by carrying her up in the midst of them. He declined her invitation to remain longer, and after seeing her safely established on the sofa, he bade her good-day, and sauntered away to spend the evening with Gypsy, little dreaming that poor Olive was bitterly crying, with her face buried in the cushions.

CHAPTER XV.

THE SERPENT RING.

IMOGENE'S birthday came a week before the party, and was the occasion of Davie producing an innumerable array of fancy articles. Pincushions were predominant, but there was also a generous supply of card-baskets and braided comb-cases, all of most elaborate patterns in a high state of colors. They cost the dear child weeks of stolen time, to say nothing of the great self-command and watchfulness it required to keep the secret. Davie had begged that the party might take place on Genie's birthday, but, for some reason of her own, Imogene would not consent, insisting that it was given in honor of Philip and Thaddeus, and not to celebrate her insignificant birthday. With the exception of the pincushions and card-baskets, no extraordinary events occurred to signalize the day, and it passed away into evening without astonishing anybody or altering the nature of things mundane or celestial.

"Imogene, I have something to give you; come now, dear, and I'll keep the promise I made your mother," said Ruth, motioning her to accompany her. Genie obeyed, a nameless awe stealing about her heart as she silently followed Mrs. Lee to the east bedroom.

Unlocking a small drawer in the tall, brass-handled old bureau, she took from thence the little mother-of-pearl box, holding it reverently in a musing attitude before opening it. The tiny velvet case fell into her lap. The girl's wondering eyes never left it, burning down on it as if the hidden semblance shrined within charmed before they had beheld the token. "The day your mother died, she gave me this, charging me to deliver it on your fifteenth birthday. It is

the only thing she left in trust for you. 'Tell her,' said she, and her voice was very weak, I remember how she struggled to utter the words, 'tell her that her mother wore it honorably.'" Ruth laid the serpent ring in Imogene's extended hand, half fearful that the hideous emblem would hiss at being disturbed from its long sleep. "It is a costly jewel; I would not mention that I possessed it," cautioned Ruth.

"Not to *any one*, aunt?" She was thinking of Philip. It would be a secret from *him*.

Mrs. Lee shook her head.

"Do you think my mother would have desired entire silence regarding it?"

"I have no doubt of it, Genie. She was particular about it, and never told me until she was dying. Out of regard for her unspoken wishes I have never mentioned it even to David. I term unspoken wishes the language of her eyes, which thus impressed me at the time, and as such I have ever since regarded it."

This was enough. Imogene was content, and turned the ring over in her hand, her face wearing a solemn, curious expression, different from any that Ruth had ever seen there before. "It is worth a fortune — ruby, emeralds, diamonds," she said, carefully scanning the gems, and holding it up to the dim light. She liked strange, gorgeous things, and the magnificent, unique jewel pleased her beyond words. The doubt clinging to her birth, which had always haunted her, revived in new force. Who was she? Who was her mother? Not of the common people, and honorably possess a ring like this. The village had forgotten to sneer at her birth, or to wonder at her mother's history. "Who was my mother? who am I?" were exasperating questions, that Imogene had wearied herself in asking. "Oh! to know something of my parentage!" was the deep, silent cry of her soul. Ruth feared it would come

to this; but Elinor had died and left her powerless to soothe the torturing doubts, or explain away the innate cravings of the young creature — to fathom the mystery enshrouding the loved memory of her parent. Ruth read the child's thoughts, and looked toward the bed, as if it could render a satisfactory account of Elinor's unknown past. "Who was Elinor?" There was no response! But the doubt and distrust of her reserve had fallen like a blight on Imogene. The mother had bequeathed her intricate, mysterious life, blemished intransmutably by vague doubts and suspicious obscurity, to the daughter — a bitter heritage, growing more bitter and torturing every year. Ruth's face was troubled; but the grave could not speak, and who of the living could tell? She was forced to leave it there, and went out, leaving Genie alone. She kissed the ring, pressed it, looked at it, turned it over, and slipped it on and off a dozen times before returning it to the pearl box. Her thoughts were not all of Philip that night, for she got up twice to look at it, and the last time muttered: "*I* am a charity child, but my mother was not a beggar, nor my father a pauper, though they left *me* both."

. . . . . .

The first snow of the season all day had been whitening the earth, and a cold, stormy night set in, bleak and cheerless; but the Lee household, gathered around the blazing wood fire, paid little heed to the dismal inclemency of the weather.

Davie sat on one side the shaded lamp, busily knitting a scarlet and white breakfast shawl, while Mrs. Lee placidly darned stockings on the other. David, leaning back in his comfortable arm-chair, alternately dozed and meditated, occasionally spreading out his hands in the ruddy firelight, as if he quite appreciated the enjoyable sense of possessing a warm, cheerful fireside, and a pretty, amiable wife and daughter. Imogene was not present, and Ruth

was about to remark her absence, when a loud rap resounded on the outer door. David hastened to admit whoever it might be, for it was a rough night to keep one waiting. A great stamping and shuffling in the passage indicated that the new-comer was well laden with snow, and premeditated spending the evening, by the care he took in shaking it from his overcoat and cap. Mr. Lee stood looking on, holding the candle above his head, in mystified wonder. Who on earth could it be? Ruth paused with her darning-needle suspended, and Davie dropped a loop in the scarlet stripe. At last David returned, closely followed by a tall, spare gentleman. The stranger had dark, auburn hair, and full, tawny whiskers and moustache. Vida politely offered a chair, but the stranger was so visibly agitated that he took no notice of the civility. After honoring him with a long, scrutinizing look, that was more curious than courteous, she cried, "Why, it's Thad!" and sprang into his arms, with the half-finished breakfast-shawl a gay tangle at her feet.

"Bless my soul, so it is!" exclaimed David, grasping him by the hand.

"Ah! indeed; Thaddeus, my son!" Ruth's voice, faint with joy and surprise, caused him to put Davie aside and pick up that little woman in a strong, fond clasp; and, with her head upon his breast, he was not ashamed of the tear stealing over his bearded cheek.

"Dear, dear mother; thank God for this blessed hour!" he murmured, chokingly. "Father and sister all together again, thank God!"

"Amen!" answered every voice.

Davie wiped her eyes, and went about recovering her precious worsteds, kicked anywhere on the floor. As soon as the happy hubbub subsided sufficiently to admit of thoughts and needs, Ruth bustled away to see about supper, well knowing that fasting after a long, cold day's journey was not agreeable.

"Phew! what whiskers! I vow, I am almost afraid of you," said Davie, burying her hand in the tawny luxuriance to verify the assertion.

Thaddeus did not reply, for he was looking beyond her sunny head at the beautiful apparition standing irresolutely in the doorway, as if doubting the propriety of advancing. It was very evident that Imogene was unaware of the stranger's presence. She had not expected it, and lifted a hesitating, inquiring glance, first at Davie, and then to the stranger, before her countenance lighted up with recognition.

"Surely, I should know this gentleman. Welcome home, Thaddeus." She came quickly forward, and gave him her hand.

"Is it possible, Imogene! And the welcome, is it strong enough to admit of a kiss? I remember, you refused to grant one when I went away," he replied, moved out of his habitual reserve by her witching beauty and grace.

"The ban is removed, the promise invalid, and there is my cheek," she laughed, offering her blushing face.

He had never kissed her, and now the touch of her lips thrilled him to the very finger-tips. Davie might have smothered him in kisses, but the one little pressure of Genie's dewy mouth touched a depth in Thad's bosom that had never before been sounded. It astonished and alarmed him; for, had he not always loved Vida, and disliked Imogene? Oh, sophistical, inexplicable human heart, how aimlessly you go drifting about on love's turbulent sea! Now in the dangerous breakers, now dashing to pieces on hidden reefs, now thumping on the strand or fast aground on some desolate barren shore, where remorseful waves or regretful billows are continually dashing over your unanchored and rudderless wreck!—why can't you stay in the deep, peaceful soundings where there is safe tranquillity, and not go sailing heedlessly in shoal water to meet certain disappointment and destruction?—what was the use of Thaddeus

thinking of Imogene? — what was she to any one but Philip? — and Davie, she was his sister; but Imogene was — different.

Thaddeus insisted on occupying his old room under the roof, and bowed his tall form up the narrow stairway, feeling that it was good to be at home once more. He could hear the girls chattering in their room, and noticed the light creeping from under the door.

"Great alterations have taken place in the old house. I wonder if Mr. Lee allows a fire in their sleeping apartment? If he does, then they can persuade him to anything, for I recollect that was his one strong and inexorable point," thought Thaddeus, setting his candle down on an old trunk in the corner, which in the days of his boyhood did duty as a stand, and looking out into the storm. Who has not stood at a familiar window overlooking a familiar landscape and watch a driving snow-storm through a hazy moonlight? Yes, moonlight; it is not incompatible with a white storm — the hills in winding sheets, the corn-stubble nicely covered, and rounded like little graves in long unvarying rows. Thaddeus put down the sash with a sigh. It was a cold greeting from nature, and the dark stretch of woodland seemed darker than ever it appeared before. One glimpse satisfied — it were pleasanter to go to bed and think of *Imogene.*

A peep at the girls might not be uninteresting at the confiding hour of retiring, when Davie's social soul disburdened itself of the day's accumulated gossip, which she was famous for retailing in homœopathic doses, in order to make as much as possible of the supply, to Imogene in the strict seclusion of their chamber. It may be bold of us to intrude, but we will pray pardon, and venture on the intrusion.

Davie let down the curtains, and, between shivering and disrobing, exclaimed:

"Now we will have our party! Ah! but ain't Thad splendid? I wonder if he can dance? My! didn't he stare at you, though? He was transfixed. I wish Lieutenant Shirley could have seen *that* look; he'd run him through to-morrow the first thing before breakfast. If Phil would only get jealous, wouldn't it be fun? Ugh, how cold! and the snow rattling against the window-panes. I'm glad Thad's safe home, for the roads stand a fair chance of being impassable by morning. I did not know him at first; it was such a surprise. We are to have new dresses for the party; and I mean to coax papa to let us have a fire in our room; he is so dreadful stubborn *there.* But I mean to renew the siege, else I'll perish with cold — a frost-bidden victim of his stern obstinacy. I don't believe it's so unhealthy as freezing, and that's what I am this minute. The sheets are ice — ugh! a veritable skating-pond," ran on Davie, cuddling down in the bed, although visibly shrinking from the icy sheets. "Now, *don't* you, Genie," she commanded in mild displeasure, lifting her head the better to urge her dissuasion of Imogene's cruelty in pulling aside the curtain from the west window, leaving the glaring panes exposed, and all the outer sash clogged with snow, battered in the corners and packed against the glass in a manner perfectly woful to poor shuddering Davie, regarding her disapprovingly from the bed, with the clothes tucked about her neck in the attitude of an indignant turtle who was not aware whether it was best to leave his head in sight or not. "Now don't, Imogene; a glaring window is next to a ghost, and makes me all creepy with shivers, and you *will* persist in looking out, though it is cold enough to freeze the Esquimaux, and nothing but a grave-yard to enliven the cheerful prospect."

"And that is the main attraction," said Imogene. "I can almost distinguish my mother's headstone through the

falling snow. If it were not for the storm, it would be beautiful moonlight."

"Yes; and if it was May, it would not be December," dryly replied Davie.

But Imogene took no notice. "There is the button-ball-tree in the lane," she continued, folding her arms on the sill, and putting out her head so far that the black curls were white with snow-flakes, "and the haystacks beyond the gaunt old poplars, the lilacs in the garden, and the currant-bushes one indistinguishable row."

"Never mind viewing nature under such chilling disadvantages," recommended Davie. "It's a mercy you don't congeal. Come to bed; I want to talk to you, and it's Greenland up there."

"Oh, I don't care for the cold. Just hear the old pear-tree groan, scratching and sawing against the house, as if it would like to get in."

"I should think it did scrape and saw. If you keep on, you will certainly give me the nightmare. Put down the curtain, *do!*" petulantly emphasized Davie from the pillow.

"I like a storm," said Genie, reluctantly closing the window, and fumbling for her night-dress among the numerous garments Davie had carelessly thrown on the chair at the foot of the bed. "Yes; fierce, drifting, driving, pelting storms. That is, when I feel fierce and stormy myself; and sometimes I long for the languor and bloom of the tropics, for spicy Southern breezes, warm skies, and a perennial flower-teeming earth. I wonder where I was born?"

"In Iceland, on a floating iceberg, I should say, judging by your present taste and apparent enjoyment of cool surroundings," irreverently responded Davie. "I'm as warm as toast, and your feet are sure to be clods. Have done with your vagaries. Who cares *where* they are born, so long as they *are* born? For pity sake don't hatch up any new whim to get blue and glum about. There, I'll cover

my head, and you may stare at snowy grave-yards and listen to groaning pear-trees as leisurely and long as you please; I'm going to sleep," resolutely concluded Davie, turning over with a jerk, face to the wall, and determinedly drawing the blankets over her ears. In two minutes she was in dream-land, only a bit of light hair being visible above the covering.

A quarter of an hour later the dark locks of Imogene pressed the pillow, but the glowing face needed no warmth save that of the rich, vigorous blood flowing from heart to lips, and back again, in a hot, regular tide.

It was very late when Ruth stole in to take a look at them, and make sure that they were comfortably tucked in their soft nest. Wrapped in a thick gray shawl, she stood looking at the two young sleepers. The candle she carried was low in the socket, indicating that not more than twenty minutes of light remained in it, but Ruth was not mindful of it: holding it so as to throw a partial light across the slumbering features of Genie, she softly laid her cheek on the young brow; the action was sweeter, more loving, than a kiss.

"I have faithfully kept my trust, Elinor," she whispered, "and as my own, have loved and cared for your child. A hard task you left me as guardian of this marvellous beauty. I can well believe that she comes of a proud, beautiful, self-willed race, for every feature bears the impress of a haughty, unyielding lineage. And when this gifted, unsatisfied spirit chafes at its bondage, and demands a broader field than my home can give, where, Elinor, oh, where am I to find food to satisfy this soul-hunger, or strength to subdue the restless, discontented heart-yearnings of this rarely endowed nature?" As if in answer to her words, a soft spirit-voice breathed through all the room: "In your love, Ruth, *in your love.*" The still small voice banished her doubts, and, comforted by the heavenly admo-

nition, Ruth resolved to pray and not falter; yet she feared, feared beyond her reason, a something which, like an evil presentiment, was intangible and inexplicable, but yet ever uppermost in her mind.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PARTY.

THE all-eventful evening arrived, and both Imogene and Davie were in a high state of spirits. It was a grand epoch in their quiet existence, and they felt, especially the latter, its responsibility and greatness, as the week of anxiety she had devoted to the dress and cake requisite for the occasion bore evidence. A good old-fashioned country party—what dear, delightful gatherings they are! The sociality and good cheer is something to remember. The zest and innocent, pleasurable anticipations and enjoyment of a girl's first party, no amount of after splendid dissipation can destroy or dim.

To-night Imogene was radiant in white and scarlet, a cluster of scarlet geraniums and a green leaf or two in her hair. A simple toilet, but it became her perfectly, and she wore it like a young princess.

Davie was lovely in white tarlatan and blue ribbons, consequently not looking "a rag;" a single blush-rose in the yellow braids. For a month the infant bud had been anxiously watched, coaxed, and tended for this important occasion, and on the morning of the party had the gratitude and grace to bloom full and fragrant as ever a winter rose could, ambitious of dying amid the burnished gold of Davie's hair.

By half-past nine the parlor was full. Of course Philip and Thaddeus were the lions of the evening. The tall, reticent, tawny-whiskered lawyer, and the lively, agreeable, plain-featured young officer were the cynosures of every bright-eyed Alden belle. Thad was the handsomer, but so grave that the girls declared they were afraid of him; consequently, the little lieutenant was the favorite, ready to laugh, talk, and dance with the merriest.

Without recourse to mullein-leaves, Davie's round cheeks threatened as deep a carnation as Genie's, and, vigorously fanning, from the unwonted exercise of the first quadrille, she said:

"Goodness, where did Phil learn to dance so well?" looking toward that youthful soldier, who was whirling about the room with his arm around Susie Johnson's trim waist.

Genie hid a frown, and shut the red lips tight, as if to control the bitter words trembling on her tongue.

"Ask Miss Susie, she may know," was the short, sarcastic answer. The sarcasm was lost on Davie.

"I 'm engaged for the next waltz with him. Oh, but ain't Susie in the seventh heaven! she will talk of nothing else for a week. No doubt he learned his steps at that dreadful Benny Haven's, whose virtues he sings with a detestable "O" for a final flourish; and so particular in his dress, when he used to look like a scarecrow. I can remember him hatless, shoeless, and jacketless, and what was left much in need of repairs. Do you dance, Thad?"

"No."

"How provoking; but you are such an old grandfather," said lively Davie, walking off on the arm of Fred Carter to mingle with the gay dancers. Thaddeus planted himself against the wall abstractedly, knitting his brows as he watched the merry throng go laughingly by. No amount of bright smiles and shy, covert glances were strong enough

to allure him from his self-imposed isolation. He saw but one of all those young, graceful girls. A moment before, Imogene had been standing by his side, but now she was sitting at the piano, playing brilliant waltzes for the company. How different her touch from that which preceded it! Everybody noticed it and the performer; then the magic music sent them all whirling again in time to the harmony. Thaddeus observed that the brow was now clear, the beautiful face animated, the whole dark aspect changed to gay vivaciousness. But whence the cloud? It troubled him, and involuntarily his gaze went over to her, more fixed and penetrating than he was conscious of. Philip, happening to pass by at the instant, followed his eye, and remarked, meaningly, "Have a care, Thad. Look, but do not get intoxicated. You have travelled somewhat remote from this place, but did you ever behold any creature so beautiful as yon fairy-fingered player?"

"No."

The short answer fell curtly from the lawyer's compressed lips. Phil laughed maliciously, assuming a provokingly familiar air: "Futile, my dear fellow; absolutely futile. I was her sworn friend, when others, to put it mildly, disliked her."

"You are modest," sneered Thaddeus, giving him a disdainful look.

"And you are jealous," returned Phil, smiling sarcastically.

"You mistake, young man. I admire Imogene as I would a rare, perfect painting — a work of art infused with warm, breathing life. She is a most beautiful, lovable, and gifted girl, and will make a dear, unmanageable, *dangerous* woman. Once, in my biased affection for Davie, I unjustly overlooked Imogene. Now, I esteem and highly honor her as she deserves. I can afford to be generous, for well I know that Davie is by far the better blest."

"Your compliments sound rather ambiguous. Sour grapes, I fancy," muttered Phil, moving away.

The music had ceased, and with it had vanished Imogene. In the general buzz of conversation that followed, Thaddeus also made his escape.

The evening, which had promised so much pleasure to Genie, so far, was a miserable failure. Philip had neglected her entirely — had laughed, and talked, and flirted with every girl in the room without paying her the slightest attention. She had tried to forget it, but it was so irksome feigning mirth and gayety when she was feeling so utterly wretched. Slighted, neglected, forgotten — the thought would come in defiance of contrary reasoning, and she crept through the sitting-room and hid herself in the dark stairway, where Thad stumbled over her when going up to his dormitory.

"What, you, Genie! why, what are you doing here?" he exclaimed, in surprise.

"Oh! getting cool; it 's so warm in there," she replied, evasively, standing to one side and making room for him to pass.

"Getting cold, you mean," said he, putting his hand kindly on her shoulder; then lower, almost a whisper, "Are you happy, Genie?"

"Happy!" The vacancy in her voice and the doubtful look she turned on him were painful to hear and see. "Happy! are any of us happy, Thaddeus?"

"Yes; in a certain sense, Davie is happy."

"Davie, I know, but—but the capacity is not large enough to hold much depth of what we call the opposite of happiness —sorrow. The shallow brook, not being deep, must needs run merrily along its course, accepting the sunshine and the dew, but never asking from whence it came; and the great storms which lash the dark, fathomless waters into all sorts of furious commotions, leave the little, peaceful stream

undisturbed. It's very weakness saves it. Davie *can't help* being happy."

"Then you depreciate our Davie's simple, truthful, loving nature?" said Thaddeus, uneasily.

"You are wrong — I envy it." She sighed, sat down on the step, and again motioned him to pass; but he did n't.

"What ails you, Genie? you are young to talk so bitterly."

"Young! I am a hundred years old; and I do wish, Thad, that I had not the power of *thinking*. It is a horrible thing to be always thinking, and never able to make your thoughts clear. What *is* thought?" she suddenly demanded, grasping him by the arm, as if she would know — as if he must tell her.

He was amazed at her unexpected vehemence. "Thought, rightly directed, is noble and godlike. It is the secret of power, and governs the world; but yours are morbidly perverted, I fear; falsely colored, and depressed by trying to dive deeper than your years. Time will straighten it. I used to stumble under the burden of my own ideas, and grope about after that which later years brought of themselves without the pain of struggling to obtain it by a premature and exhausting search. Keep the lamps you have trimmed, but do not strive to light others until you are sure they contain oil sufficient to keep them burning. Now run back to your guests, and good night. They will not miss a grum old fellow like me."

He pressed her hand, and saw the chamber-door close behind her. He stood alone on the stairs. "Poor child! she is unhappy from the neglect of that egotistical, presuming young Shirley. Confound his impudence! But I could not tell her so — I *dare* not. It would have sent a flame to her eyes that I would not care to kindle. She may mourn; but, if I remember the old spirit, she will permit no one to censure his conduct." The face in his dreams

that night was dark and beautiful, and "happy" was all the lips could echo, like something she had never possessed.

Emerging from the dark stairway, Imogene felt a hand clasp hers. "Oh! here you are, deserter. A fine chase you have led me. Now give an account of yourself."

Philip drew her into the sitting-room, and seeing her sad face, asked more seriously: "What 's the matter; are you not well?"

"Yes."

"Well, what is the matter, then?"

"Nothing."

"That won't do. When a girl says there is nothing the matter, you may be certain that the deuce is to pay. Something is wrong, else why this troubled look? Come, now, Gypsy, let 's have it."

She did not answer, but he felt her trembling, a sign that he knew with her boded a burst of tears.

"If you will not speak, let me look in your eyes, and I can guess."

He took her face between his hands, the white lids drooping over the dark orbs slowly lifted. The magnetic gaze above raised them without her will, and the smaller, sharper, stronger eyes were looking straight into the soft, liquid velvet of hers.

"I have it!" dropping her face and walking half across the room, only to turn and come back again, an odd mixture of power, love, and self-vanity expressed in his tone and manner. "Slighted again, eh, Gyp?"

"You are cruel," she said, making a great effort to control the quiver in her voice.

"Am I, when I love you better than myself? Is it quite just, Gypsy?" His kiss and breath was on her lips, and — and she was happy.

"Do you love me, Philip, best of them *all?*"

"You know I do, if you will reason, and not get jealous

so quick. Now, don't you cry, for I want to dance with you half a dozen times yet," rejoined Philip, passing his hands over her face to see if it were wet — it was quite dark in their corner — a method he employed for ascertaining the state of the feminine heart through the sympathetic eyes. "But there is one thing I want to impress upon your mind: here, now, always, everywhere, that, no matter what I say, do, or look, you are to remember that I love you best, first, and last, and that all other attentions are light, trifling, for the hour, and nothing more. Don't mind anything else, and your faith will spare you these cruel heart-aches."

"Not Susie Johnson?" Imogene asked, dubiously. Philip had not quite succeeded in laying the ghost.

"So she was your particular trouble. You over-estimated her and underrate yourself by thinking I could neglect you for her."

"But she likes you, Philip," mournfully remonstrated Genie, as if it were a solemn matter to like him.

"And so does somebody else, whom *I* like a thousand times better. Susie is a silly, good-natured creature, who dances quite well. Now you have my opinion of her; and as the wound is healed, we'll to the festive hall again." Not, however, until he had kissed back all the smiles and sparkle.

"Oh, you truants!" cried Davie, spying them in a twinkling. "Thad has disappeared, and shabby of him, too, considering he is such an important personage, and half the party in his honor, besides," she chided, in a tumult of agitation, lest Phil and Genie had also deserted her at the most trying period of her life.

"Do you know," whispered Philip, when they were alone by the window, that I saw some one looking love at you to-night, deep, intense, soul-love, such as his heart will never cherish or produce again?"

"Poor fellow!" commiseratingly rejoined Genie, glancing askance from under her black lashes. "Poor fellow! I am sorry for him; but you deserved the punishment."

"No punishment at all. I laughed at the poor devil, for I was so confident of your love, that I did not honor him by a single jealous thought. I would not fear a score of gallant lovers sighing at your feet. I know my Gypsy too well."

"You are over-confident," saucily flashing back his look of conscious power.

"Pooh, don't I know that I have but to speak and I am supreme."

"You are wonderfully conceited, Mr. Lieutenant; of that there can be no doubt. I may astound you yet by my inconstancy, so do not be too certain of the stableness of your conquest. Easy won, easy lost, and fickleness belongs to my sex," warned Imogene.

"I know it, but not to *you*. You are mine; it is written, and thus be it," he replied, part gayly, part gravely, floating away in the circle of waltzers.

After all, the party was a brilliant success. Imogene was forced to acknowledge the truth, and wonder why she could have been so stupid as to skulk off and sit jealous and cross on the stairs, to be stumbled over by Thad, and afterward make a fool of herself by talking imbecile stuff about thought. She was ashamed of it, and hoped Thad would forget it by morning. Why, thought was happiness, and it lay in her bosom that night in the form of a simple name — *Philip*.

As for Davie, she vowed parties just the most splendid institutions in the universe, and dancing the greatest invention of mankind or womankind, whichever it might be, and music the most delightful invention of it all. She voted Terpsichore a sensible muse, and declared herself a devotee of her witching art.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SLEIGH-RIDE.

IT was a gay season with the young people of Alden, for in a week Thaddeus and Philip were to depart for their distant and separate fields of action, and it was but meet that the few remaining days should contribute their full share of pleasure. The day before his departure, a handsome sleigh, drawn by a fine chestnut horse, dashed up to David Lee's door, and Philip sprang from among the white bear-skins. A quick, ringing step came along the frozen path, a hasty knock, and the young officer made his *entrée* into the presence of Mrs. Lee and her daughters, bringing a whiff of cool air in his train. After the usual intimate greetings had taken place all round, he said to Imogene:

"Come, Gypsy, put on your things; there never was such sleighing. Zephyr is in admirable speed and spirits, and skims the road like a bird."

Genie looked at Mrs. Lee for permission to accept his invitation. Since noon she had been in a fever of restless excitement and watching expectation. The tinkling bells of the restive chestnut did not surprise her when they stopped under the maples, although she pretended to be as unconscious as Davie.

"It is very cold," remonstrated Ruth, glancing out of the window. "A very cold day, indeed, and it is after two o'clock. It will be a severe evening. I hardly think it prudent for Genie to go."

"Oh, I have plenty of robes, and she can bundle up warm. Never fear but I 'll take care of her. This is my last sleigh-ride, and you will not be so cruel as to refuse me Gypsy's company this time?"

It was a powerful argument in his favor, but Ruth was still reluctant, and took a longer survey of the icy aspect from the window.

"I do not like to deny you, Philip, but—"

"Oh! then, Aunt Ruth, don't," broke in Genie; "Phil always takes good care of me, and I am not afraid of the cold."

Ruth had not the heart to offer any further objections, although she had serious misgivings as to the wisdom of granting the request. Imogene flew up stairs for her wrappings, Davie tripping on behind to see that the numerous shawls and cloaks the good Ruth particularly enjoined were rightly adjusted, and was confounded at Genie's singular trepidation and alarming absence of mind.

"Are you daft, that you hunt in my work-basket for your muff? And I am positive your hood and gloves are not under the pincushion, that you knock it over so rudely. Here they are. Let me fix your fur collar. You are charming, upon my life. There, you are bundled shapeless," said Davie, deftly helping her tie and button and pin.

Genie was but too glad to get out of doors; the keen air felt refreshing on her hot cheeks—the black ringlets peeping from the crimson hood framed in a face of rich beauty, lighted by bewildering soft black eyes, that now were full of blended feeling, alarmed anxiety, and hopeful, eager love and trust. Cold? She was burning, and the crisp snow seemed to melt beneath her nervous footsteps. She looked toward the house, along the row of frosty upper windows, and her gaze centred on the east bedroom, close-curtained and tenantless.

Davie was shivering in the door, heroically sacrificing her dear comfort that she might see them off. Philip was fixing something about Zephyr's impatient head, backing and jerking at the halter so viciously that he was obliged

to shorten him up, in order to keep him quiet long enough to help her in the sleigh. When the chestnut found his nose close against the hitching-post, he consented to remain reasonably stationary, and Phil tucked his companion snugly and securely in among a pile of white robes, released Zephyr's insulted nose, sprang to his place beside her, shook the reins, the bells took up their silvery chime, and away they flew, the swift feet of the chestnut filling the air with miniature snow-balls, the heat of his sides forming frost on his glossy, dark coat, and the steam from his wide nostrils, congealed to ice, met the frozen foam from his champing bit. The hot breath, puffing out faster and faster, whitened his breast, and in an hour the dark chestnut was gray, yet Phil kept him to the road with unabated speed. Trees and fences whirled by, the iron-shod hoof-beats sounding sharp and regular on the hard, gratingly yielding snow. Mile after mile were passed, the farm-house was far behind, and as yet neither of the occupants of the sleigh had intruded their voice upon the music of the bells. Philip slipped his arm about his companion:

"You have not spoken a word since we started; — now give me a kiss, you statue of silence, and don't be so chary of your smiles."

She dutifully obeyed, and he whispered something that sent the black eyes down to the white robes in blushing confusion. "Mrs. Lee was so afraid that you would freeze, and your lips are burning; but they are not unpleasant to my taste. Fifteen miles more of this steady pace, and then" —

"And then," she repeated, dreamily, as if the sentence were complete without being finished —

"You shall say that this is the happiest sleigh-ride of your life."

He looked at her fondly, and drew her closer to him.

"They think us a boy and girl, but I love you, Gypsy;

love you better and different than I did in our school-days. We *are* young, but we are not too young for loving. Mrs. Lee feared the cold; but I guess she feared something else a good deal more."

"What, Philip?"

"Why that you were getting too old, too much of a young lady, to be loved and kissed and fondled by such a bear as I. She is a clever little woman, and it troubles her tender conscience, dimly divining that, mere children as we are, we may find our hearts, and, not being blessed with the wisdom that comes of age, we may do something imprudent. Oh, wise Aunt Ruth!"

Imogene looked alarmed. "Oh, Phil, don't speak lightly of one who loves and cares for me better than I deserve. Do you think we are acting mean and deceitful toward dear Aunt Ruth? I 'd rather die than be thought ungrateful. I never thought of it before, but we are acting ungenerously, Philip." The troubled look she gave him was full of new anxiety, but the youth knew how to dispel it.

"We are acting as your mother would have sanctioned. She asked me to love you, and have I not, all my life, Gypsy?"

"Yes; but"—

"Never mind conjuring up discordant doubts; you must agree with me. I know best," he interrupted, in playful authority, the beardless boy-face lighting up, and the dark, sharp eyes piercingly bright.

"Keep your hand in your muff, or Aunt Ruth will scold me for allowing it to get frost-bitten."

"It 's so hot — the cold feels good," she replied, holding it out that the floating particles of frost in the air might fall on its smooth white surface.

"Who will love me next week?" she said, after a pause.

"I will, pet Gypsy, just as well as if I were here. When I went away before, you mourned that the years would be

so long; but they were not, and here we are, loving each other better than ever, and the next time we meet it will be never to part. Only two years of separation at most, and then you are mine for good and all. I'll claim you boldly then, and those who please may think and question as they like. Perhaps I'll be a captain by that time. The pay is not much, but you would not be afraid to risk it on that, would you?" Imogene's eyes looked her willingness.

"I knew you would not hesitate to rough it with *me* anywhere; and though we do have hard times following the drum, we'll be together, and that's the balm."

"Oh, I wish the two years were over — past, gone forever — that I might go with you now. But they lie so dark between, I can scarcely discern the light beyond," sighed Gypsy. "You will write every mail; letters are months coming over those desolate plains, months in crossing from you to me, and there is another pain, Phil."

"A pain that you must ease by keeping a brave heart in your bosom. Be hopeful, and keep all our love and secrets to yourself. Wise little head and devoted heart, how unnecessary it is for me to caution! Now laugh and be gay, for I want to remember this day as the most blessed of my life! When I am away on those desolate plains, with a tent for shelter and hard-tack for food, and bloody Injuns for game, I want to remember how beautiful and light-hearted my Gypsy was on this fifth day of January, else there may be some remorseful sadness mingled with it." With all the astuteness of youth, Philip argued away her pensiveness, that was almost like regretful sorrow, he fancied; and the next chord he touched vibrated with the old tender, impulsive love. "You know, Gypsy, we are but fulfilling the promise made under the lilacs. We plighted our troth long, long ago, and we will keep the faith. Would you have it otherwise, darling?"

"Dear, dear Phil, I would not have it otherwise, and we will keep the faith."

Gone all the doubt and the gloom, her arm went around his neck in the fond, grateful, child-way, unmindful alike of the intense cold or the impropriety of embracing a young officer, though he be an accepted lover, in an open sleigh. But they were quite alone in the lonely road, and what was the harm, when the silly, loving, young things cared for nothing in the world but themselves?

"Now you are Gypsy," cried Philip, hugging her so tight that he endangered her breath. Then followed a deal of kissing and whispering; indeed, it was splendid sleighing — a happy, glorious sleigh-ride.

When Farmer Shirley's pet chestnut drew up before Mr. Lee's door the second time, the gallant animal looked as if he had had a severe drive. There was no necessity for tying him short this time; but he was very willing to stand quiet; and the dilated nostrils and trembling flanks seemed to imply that Zephyr had been put to his mettle. It was an hour after sunset, but the few glittering stars scattered over the cold, steel-blue heavens showed the smoking condition of the horse, and warned Philip to get him into his stable as soon as possible.

"I'll drive right home," said he, "and come around to-morrow. Father will raise the deuce if he sees Zephyr in this plight; but I'll take care that he don't. By Jove, he *has* travelled since sundown, but it was do or die." He lifted her out, whispered, "Think of me in your dreams, pet," and gave her a kiss, which she returned with a choking gasp and a convulsive clinging to him, under cover of freeing herself from the robes.

"Good night, Philip; early to-morrow; it—it's the last day." There were tears in her voice, but she bravely forced them back.

"I'll be on hand early. Mind, only sweet thoughts to-

night," a hurried little hand-clasp, and she ran up the path, pausing on the door-stone while he turned around. The receding bells brought Davie to admit her, full of questions and offers of assistance.

"Well, did you have a nice ride? It was shabby of Phil not to ask me. Let me take off your things," and volubly talking and kindly aiding, Davie at last ushered Imogene into the sitting-room, and saw her speedily divested of her many wrappings before continuing. "I waited supper for you. It 's stupid taking tea alone, and mother is not home. Gone to Mrs. Carter's — they sent for her; Ada's got the croup, or something or other of the kind. I think there must be two stars less in the firmament by the brilliancy of your eyes, and the saucy frost has pinched your cheeks as red as my rosebuds. It always makes me hungry to ride in the cold — come and have a nice cup of tea and a biscuit; Hetty says they are extra fine — piping hot from the oven. Oh, you need not look so indifferent. Hot biscuits are not to be despised, even after Philip Shirley and his fine turnout, which is not his. Why did n't he come in?" rattled on Davie, leading the way to the dining-room and the hot biscuits, and briskly pouring out a cup of fragrant tea.

"The horse was warm, and he dare not leave him standing in the cold," said Gypsy. She did not care for the cup of tea Davie placed before her, but she made a pretence of sipping it, and was a long time in judging about the proper quantity of milk and sugar. Davie, on the contrary, bit into her biscuit with a keen appreciation of its wholesomeness, evincing, notwithstanding the absorbing topic they were discussing, that she possessed a substantial appetite. Carefully buttering the second one, she suddenly propounded the startling inquiry, "Where did you go?"

"Oh, we drove about just where Zephyr chose to take

us," returned Genie, adding more sugar to her already three-times sweetened tea.

"Now, look here," said Davie, solemnly pausing in the act of buttering the tempting soft of her third smoking biscuit. "If Philip allowed his horse to go as he liked, he is in love with you, certain, positive, and sure. I'm not quite a novice, and know the sign. When a young gentleman is indifferent regarding the speed, gait, and direction of his horse, you may rest assured that something is wrong with his heart. I've been riding with Phil, he was always taking about a square trot, a good head, and a two-twenty-four stride, and all that sort of horse-jockey slang, whatever it may mean. I am convinced that he is loving or fixing to love you; so beware of his toils, fair Imogene."

The comic attitude of firmness she assumed, together with the warningly suspended knife and neglected remaining half of the third biscuit, was too much even for Genie's not easily provoked risibles.

"Why, Davie, how silly of you! I'm but fifteen, and ever so far from love yet," laughed she. "Only fifteen, Davie."

"Can't help it," she replied, laconically, seriously eying the edge of her plate. "Love at fifteen is as perilous as love at fifty. Love at *all* periods is dangerous, and full of troubles," delivered with a sanctimonious rising of the eyelids. "Yea, full of trials and perplexing cares; yet I presage that I will see you married to Philip Shirley, U. S. A. in initials."

"Never," she returned, hastily. "You are a false prophetess; the prediction will never come to pass, for you will never see me marry Philip, nor any one else. Disabuse your imaginative mind of the fallacy; it can never, *never* be."

"Goodness, you need not get so earnest about it, nor

sweeten your tea the fifth time," said Davie, regarding her in amazement that she should take her light words so seriously.

Imogene laughed constrainedly, and reflectively balanced her spoon on the edge of her cup. "You are as near wedding Thad as I am Phil, and when you experience the one, mayhap you will see the other."

"Then it is not inevitable. I have been so in the habit of obeying Thad, that if he should say, 'Stand up, Miss Davie Lee, I have concluded to marry you, and there is no other alternative,' I have not the least doubt but what I should rise instantly and meekly to my feet, and dutifully repeat the responses, without a thought of refusing him. However, I am glad you have decided not to have Phil. I'll appropriate him myself; that is, if he will let me, and Thad don't propose meanwhile."

Imogene sat silent, paying little attention to her companion's lively prattle. This roused her just indignation.

"Well, of all the oddities, I must say you are the oddest. Here you sit, grave as an owl, just after an hilarious sleigh-ride, which would have given me a cause to expatiate for a week; and it's too bad he is going away so soon! To-morrow bids adieu to our little soldier-boy. When Phil comes again, we will be too big for romping around and kissing indiscriminately. We will be obliged to play the 'decorous young lady,' demure in manners and speech, commencing our remarks with a precise 'Mr.' But what's the use of talking? you will not listen, and all my eloquence is wasted on deaf ears."

This brought Davie to the chamber door. Still offended, she disrobed in silence, although it cost her a deal of misery to keep so during the brief half-hour intervening between hair-pins and the pillow. Blessed sleep soothed her grievance, much to Imogene's relief, who lay awake long after she was asleep, thinking, until her brain and heart ached

with the burden of thought: "Dear Philip, my dreams, waking, or sleeping, forever shall be of thee!" She fell away into slumber with the fond words on her lips, "forever shall be of thee — of thee!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

GOOD-BY.

THE next day, when Philip came to bid the Lees good-by, Imogene dared not give him her hand, it trembled so violently at the last moment of his stay. He rose to go, and then her face actually became ashy, and the wild eyes fastened on him, a world of agony in the gaze — a prayerful, beseeching, idolatrous look, that sent a faintness to his heart and a mist to his eyes. It made him frantic to catch her up and proclaim to Ruth, to Davie, to everybody, that he loved her, and that — madness! what would it avail? He must go just the same; but he could not leave her, with that unspoken prayer in her eyes unheard. How could he manage to see her alone? Imogene solved the question. Turning her face away, she forced a gay manner and lively tone: "Wait a minute, prospective chieftain, and, if not presumptuous, I will accompany you a little way on the march to glory," and, snatching up her hood and shawl, she was out of the door before any one could object. She had the start of Philip, but he was not long in overtaking her. Ruth looked after them anxiously, but said nothing. How could she? They were such old playmates, and so very young.

When clear of the house, Imogene's overstrained courage broke down completely. "I can't believe you are going. I

will not have it so. I cannot, oh, I cannot let you go," she sobbed, clinging to him, as if her weak hands could detain him against all greater powers.

"But you must," said the young officer, gently disengaging the clinging hands and imprisoning them in his strong, warm grasp. "You must be brave and reasonable, and bid me a cheerful, hopeful God-speed. I know it is hard, but you do not sorrow alone. Think how I, separated from everything, shall miss my darling. The pain is divided, Gypsy, and we will each bear our half, knowing that our love and faith is secure, that our hearts are one, as our lives, and that I go to win the means of support which shall give me the right to claim you."

"Forgive me, Philip; I have been selfish, and thought only of myself. I am unjust, I know; but since yesterday a terrible fear has seized me, that — that you will forget me — that you will weary of my love. I can't put the cruel doubt into words, or wrong you by their utterance; but, oh, Philip, if the time *should* ever come, let me die, but never let me live to know that you love me less than now. Oh, God, I can almost read the future, and beyond the veil I see the dreadful doubt a baleful reality. I see — I see —"

Her terrified eyes, fixed as it seemed on the awful spectre her distraught mind shadowed forth, suddenly closed, her head fell to his arm, and her cheek laid like snow against his sleeve. Poor Imogene had fainted, and lay like a corpse in his arms.

He knew every nerve was strung to the highest tension, but he had not looked for this, or the new distracted fear possessing her of his own unfaithfulness. It staggered him for an instant, when he recovered his presence of mind and busied himself in restoring her to consciousness. A piteous sigh soon told of his success. Kissing her cold face, he whispered, "I don't know you after all, Gypsy, for

I thought you were made of sterner stuff, and you have disappointed me by an out-and-out faint, as well as prophesying terrible things of me," making a miserable effort to smile. "You have known me all your life — are you afraid to trust me now?"

"No, no, Philip; but the thing came over me so real that it benumbed my senses. I saw it, so near, so palpable, so appalling — a vision, a fancy, a chimera of the brain, call it what you will, but hideously natural, with your face and form, but your heart was not the same; I saw it plain, and the love of to-day was not there. It was defaced and tarnished by something else, and the fearful sight stopped the throbbing of mine."

"What a silly vision, and what a silly girl to believe it! Before God, no other woman ever has or ever will supplant you in my love. *Never*, so heaven help me, Gypsy. You fill my heart, you ever have, and ever shall, and may the life be stricken out of me if ever it harbors a thought of another. Why, I could n't, Gypsy, and you ought to know it." He looked hurt, although he kept caressing her forehead.

"Oh! it was not that I feared you would love any woman better. It was not that, Phil; *I* am fixed there. No, no; it was not that."

"What the mischief was it, then — fainting away from imaginary jealousy, and a woman not the cause? You are certainly suggestive of a strait-jacket."

"I don't know, but I was not jealous: it was as if you loved me better than yourself, and yet sacrificed us both for a skeleton thing that was not worthy of the sacrifice. It 's gone now. I'll not be so foolish again; you are not cross?"

"Cross with you? what, now, when I am so soon to leave you." He folded her in his arms, close to his breast, in a long, convulsive clasp. The tremulous sob in his voice

hushed the moan in Imogene's. A long, long, passionate kiss, a choking good-by, Philip broke from her detaining arms, and was gone.

Imogene looked after him, wringing her hands in anguish and huskily calling his name; but the wind brought back no response to her pitiful cry. Dropping to her knees, the snow cold beneath, the heavens cold above, she clasped her shaking hands above her white face, mourning in saddest accents: "We are parted! we are parted! Oh, Philip, forever parted!" Staggering to her feet, she blindly turned homeward, still calling, despairingly, "Philip! Philip! Philip!" in a voice little above a whisper. How she lived through that wretched night she never knew, but she did; and hid her feelings so effectually that no one guessed her misery.

It took a week for life to revolve back again into the old grooves, and summon the old patient spirit of watching and waiting. Imogene gave no heed to Thad's departure. Davie's plaintive lamentations and Ruth's silent sorrow were nothing to her. She could not share their grief, for her soul was suffering keener pangs than theirs could ever know or understand.

She hardly raised her eyes when Thaddeus approached to say farewell. "Good-by, Imogene, may I take what you refused me before, and granted afterward?"

"No, never again. The ban is once more all-powerful." The words were playful, but her look was cold.

"And the ban is — *Philip*."

She regarded him frigidly. "You are extremely delicate in your observations, Mr. Ruggles, and exceedingly rapid in your conclusions. Your imagination anticipates what others do not presume to remark upon;" and, with a slight bow, Imogene left him to ponder at her haughty conduct as he liked. Her freezing manner quenched the love-spark just glimmering into a flame, and left his bosom barren of

Imogene. He knew where her heart was then; irretrievably Philip Shirley's, to bless or curse. He thought the latter, yet prayed the first. It was useless for him to think of her, utterly useless; but he had, and there was marvellous sweetness in the spell she had unconsciously thrown about him. It was over, the glamour, the hope, and the sweetness; he would go back to his toil, and forget her. Davie's plentiful shower of tears somewhat compensated for Imogene's coldness, and he felt a strange, guilty thrill that he had preferred another kiss to hers. The lively, affectionate little soul had nothing below the surface to mar the sunshine of her happy face. Through the frank blue eyes he could see the innocent, open heart—childish, but good and pure, and incapable of either wrong acts or wrong thoughts. Again he felt that Davie was by far the better blessed.

CHAPTER XIX.

DAVIE SPEAKS HER MIND.

THE marked change in Imogene's character was noticeable even to Davie. Every day she grew more thoughtful and fonder of being alone. She never liked work, and Mrs. Lee had long ago ceased to urge her assistance in household affairs. She never refused, but it was evidently so distasteful and irksome that Mrs. Lee could not find it in her nature to insist on her taking part in the ruder labor of the farm-house. Genie's hands were as innocent of dish-water and broom-handles as the finest lady's in the land, and serenely ignorant physically of the manifold scrubbing, baking, and sweeping that kept the old homestead in such

prime order. Davie, too, was a bit of an idler, inheriting none of her parent's busy thrift and manual love of hit-or-miss work; but the dear butterfly was not altogether useless, for she could make a bed, cake, or bouquet unexceptionably; could feed the chickens and sprinkle the clothes — only Hetty was sure to grumble, when it came to the ironing, that they were too wet or too dry; and was therefore not in the least thankful for her gratuitous service. Added to this, she had been known to set the table several times quite neatly, and she possessed a wonderful genius for being seized with sudden fits to clean and rearrange closets, disembowel old chests, and explore the inmost recesses of dusty cupboards, rummaging and overhauling every nook and corner into which she could poke her little head; and when everything was pulled out and in the utmost confusion, scattered everywhere about the floor, she was certain to get tired, and leave the yawning closets, chests, or cupboards robbed of their varied contents, promiscuously tumbled out, but very far from being methodically replaced, which was ostensibly the object of their overhauling. Well might Hetty dread Davie's periodical spasms of putting to rights, and shudder when she saw her emerge from unfrequented parts of the great old house with a smudgy nose and cobwebs drawn across her hair — a sure sign that she had been exploring, and that a half-day's work was left behind for her to do. Hetty's mental eye saw it all. The empty bottles and parcels of garden-seeds, the dried herbs, and rolls of patches, a package of choice old linen preserved for sudden cuts and bruises, a broken window-pane and an odd saucer, a pile of old school-books, and a multitudinous array of numberless sorts of all kinds of useful and useless articles that in some mysterious way are everlastingly accumulating in the garret and isolated crannies of a venerable old homestead. With so much material on hand, it did not take long for Davie to make

"a mess," as Hetty termed the spasmodic disentombing of the heterogeneous litter; but the dear thing's intentions were so good that the irascible Hetty had not the heart to scold her more than a minute for the dereliction of not carrying them out, venting her ill-nature by restoring them to their place with no gentle force. And, as the truth must be told, we are forced to admit that, with the exception of the occasional rummaging, the feeding of her pet bird, the watering of her plants, and her endless fancy-work, blithe Davie was not over-zealous.

So many little graves on the hillside made Ruth indulgent, and the girls did pretty much as they liked. Old closets, canaries, and house-plants had no charms for Imogene. Books and music were her only refuge and solace.

The slight misgivings which had troubled Mrs. Lee during Philip's stay vanished with his departure; and, though she liked the youth, she trembled for the influence he had ever exercised over Genie, and felt greatly relieved when he was once more travelling away from Alden; but she was far from attributing her silence and quiet to his absence, considering it merely the result of intense study and a natural disinclination for mirth and frivolous pleasure. None of the social gayeties of the village could entice her from her seclusion, and this recluse-like conduct aggravated Davie into a stern determination to speak her mind. She was excessively partial to having, in village parlance, "a good time," and enjoyed the harmless festivities of country society with the greatest delight, and it quite exasperated her to have Imogene so persistently refuse on all occasions to accompany her. It was so disagreeable and queer to be always apologizing for her non-appearance. Once Olive Colburn had sent her a kind invitation to spend the afternoon with her, but Imogene had politely declined the honor, which half the girls in the village would have given

their eyes to obtain. And at Susie Johnson's birthday party, nothing could induce her to go. Davie deemed it a very strong question, and firmly resolved to lecture her soundly; the absurdity of her behavior must not be sanctioned, and she resolutely braced herself for the exigence of forcibly expressing her disapprobation to the delinquent, and to that end she one day rigorously took Imogene to task.

"I declare you are completely inapproachable, Imogene. You deserve a severe scolding, and I am not the one to let you escape, unless you promise to go to Kate Fairchild's party next week. I am ashamed to be seen always without you, and I have made up my mind that you shall go."

Genie shrugged her shoulders. "I hate parties; they are so dull. A lot of chattering boys and girls jammed into a room. Nothing can supersede the tedium of a rural bread-and-butter party."

Davie's unwonted temerity was fast deserting her, and she lost somewhat the positive for the more persuasive argument to accomplish her purpose.

"I shall be so unhappy if you don't go; and I'll not go one step alone. I'll go nowhere without you in the future," dolefully affirmed Davie, assuming the air of a martyr about being led to the stake. This was more effective, and immediately brought Imogene to terms.

"I would not willingly spoil any one's pleasure, least of all, yours, Sunbeam. Suppose we compromise the matter. If I will agree to go, will you promise not to ask nor urge me to dance? Nothing less will induce me to consent."

"Certainly, if you make it the alternative; but I thought you were fond of dancing?"

"So I was, when I was younger."

"Well I vow! younger! You talk like a female Methuselah. Oh, you incorrigible Gypsy! did any one ever see

your equal? You might be the belle of Alden if you only had the ambition. And don't like to dance — well, I never!"

Davie reached the climax of her astonishment at this point, and held up her hands in wonder.

"I don't mind the mere motion of dancing — there is a certain charm in that; but it is so disagreeable to have a dozen great louts of boys putting their awkward arms about your waist, and clawing your hands a whole evening. I know of nothing so wearisome."

"Oh, you old maid! worse, a self-constituted nun, for the former are not always to be blamed — it's the opportunity, not the disposition, they lack. Get thee to a nunnery, do; where even clumsy masculine arms are sighed for in vain. You are more nice than natural, and that is a misfortune. I remember you did find it so tiresome waltzing with Phil," loquaciously remarked Davie, giving her a hard look.

"Oh, Philip was so different," quietly rejoined Genie. "My baby friend and childhood champion was always master of a grace peculiarly his own."

"Grace, indeed! I do believe you are wearing the willow for him, hence your dislike of his sex in his absence. It's abominable for you to slander all the young gentlemen in the village for his single sake. Louts, forsooth! I'd like Fred Carter to hear that; he adores you. But to dance or not to dance shall be optional with you. I will be so proud to have you with me. You are so sparkling and bewitching that you captivate everybody — the girls admiringly envious, the boys hopelessly languishing, and I vainer of your beauty than if it belonged to me, which I think is very generous of my feminine soul to admit," laughed Davie.

"Very generous and unselfish, indeed," returned Imogene. "I wish my nature were as tender toward everybody as yours is, Davie. It is either deep love or cold indifference

with me. I can cover but few with my mantle of affection. The channel is cut so deep that the current of my heart runs all one way, and gathers in a fathomless whirlpool of conflicting hopes and doubts. Better your little meandering stream, that takes pleasure in the light gayeties which my darker soul rejects, and that shall widen out into a broad, peaceful lake, a perpetual blessing to all those who come near its quiet margin. Only beautiful things will grow along your stream of life, for it flows from a pure heart-fountain that knows sin but as a name; and mine — I shudder to think of mine! Strange blossoms will spring up, seemingly fair to the eye, but to the taste a deadly poison. Instead of being proud of me, you should shun my company. There is deceit and treachery in my nature. They are the poisonous flowers, and grown on the surface of a treacherous pool. I am afraid of them myself — afraid that some day they will separate us, Davie."

"Well, I trust, if I get submerged in this faithless stream, or anywhere near its perfidious brink, you will be so good as to keep the mythical Kelpy steed ready saddled to extricate, or warn me of danger," gayly replied Davie.

Imogene suppressed a rising sigh, and said, yet more gravely:

"You don't realize it now; though you will. But you need not fear to rest under the upas; it will never poison your atmosphere; it is deleterious only to myself. Oh, Davie! I am the torrent — a restless cascade. You a happy little rivulet. And when I am dashing myself to pieces on the rocks, unable to find the right way to stay my course, you will be sweetly creeping through the pleasant meadows, guileless and free from wrong, as now. Don't forget me then, Davie — *don't forget me!*"

She had never seen her so moved, and, throwing her arms around her, she said, tenderly, "Don't believe me so heartless, sister mine. We are as we are — God made the

brook and the torrent, and he will direct their course. I am not wise, dear Genie, but I *can* see the wisdom of my Creator." A sage could not have uttered a nobler truth, and Imogene looked at her with a softer light in her eyes, and returned the pressure of her pretty white arms by a stronger clasp. Davie's joyous temperament did not admit of a very protracted depression, and the smiles were soon playing with her dimples as merrily as before.

"You need never think of engulfing me in your seething, turbulent life-cataract, for I'll float like a cork, and kiss all the poison from your noxious night-shades. You shall not predict baleful fortunes. No, no, Queen Gypsy, I'll none of it. Oh, but you are very, very lovely! I wish Phil Shirley could see you now; he would fall on his sword for very despair. No amount of flattery can spoil you. Upon my word, I don't believe you know you are handsome."

"Yes, I do, Davie; and I am proud of it, in a measure —jealous of its preservation, and love it because it makes others love me, and prize it as something too sacred and precious for common vanity, or to be flaunted about the streets for rude girls to stare at, and conceited men to comment on. I reserve it, as I do my best thoughts, for those whom I love. Every day I admire my poor face, not that *I* do so adore it, but because its beauty is dear to — to you." The last rather equivocal reason was quite flattering to Davie, and she indefinitely postponed a further lecture, especially as Imogene had evinced a proper compliance without undue harshness on her part.

CHAPTER XX.

WAITING.

WEEKS, months, a year dragged on. Spring, summer, and autumn passed, and every day the intense longing in Imogene's eyes deepened — not morosely melancholy, but uneasy and preoccupied, like one awaiting some great event. At long intervals she managed to visit the post-office in a neighboring town, and the letters she received at stated periods, dated from the distant post in Arizona, for a time kept her heart from pining and her soul free from distrust; but of late she missed something in his letters, so circumspect in composition and peculiarly dignified in tone, that an undefined alarm took possession of her breast, and the wish to see him became a continual prayer. One look in Philip's face would re-establish her faith and make her forget the miserable doubt lying cold above her love. His letters were still kind, but so formal that Imogene construed their strict formality into a guarded cautiousness, which puzzled and pained her beyond words, and all the more that she could find no tangible reason for her suspicions; but, in spite of their unsatisfactory nature, she replied as warmly as before, determined that her jealousy, as he would call it, should not creep out. She would control it thus far, and heroically smothered the unworthy fears so effectually that not a line betrayed that they existed; but the unsatisfied void ached all the harder for the fierce stifling; and although she kissed and read and reread again and again the words his hand had traced, there was something lacking. She tried to find an excuse. He was a man — a soldier — and it was not meet that he should write in a love-sick schoolboy style. He was serious and

earnest now, and she ought not to expect fond endearments on paper; it was foolish of her when Philip was so all her own, and working that she might be always with him. She sternly arraigned herself before the tribunal of her own most secret thoughts, and while condemning the innate desire for a warmer expression of his affection as silly, and not to be looked for, she actually sighed for the "fond endearments." But his last look and kiss were with her yet, and they comforted even when regrets and doubts were uppermost in her heart. Philip had obtained the coveted promotion, and was coming home on furlough. December would bring him, then all this harrowing suspense and torturing dread would be dispelled. The old steady, undying love would come back as before, and Philip's lips would dissipate the false coldness of his pen, and his smile banish the last lingering fear. There were to be no more cruel partings; she was to be his before the world, and then — Imogene's love finished the sweet thought-sentence, and *waited.*

CHAPTER XXI.

IN THE SHADOWS.

DAVIE was frequently the unconscious cause of the most poignant pain to Imogene, everlastingly bursting in with some startling piece of news that in some way was sure to be related directly or indirectly with the hidden secret that she took such good care to conceal. She was perpetually alluding in a careless, off-hand manner to Philip, and the old school likes and loves, and delighted in raking up vivid reminiscences of the past, in which he bore a conspicuous part, or descanting in eloquent terms on his recent exploits on the frontier, from whence stray bits of news found their way to Alden, food for tea-table gossip, and precious crumbs to Davie, who did not fail to hand her knowledge over to Imogene, highly embellished and enhanced by her charming *naiveté* and sprightly manner of relating. This happy faculty in the vivacious young lady was often exquisite torture to her apathetic listener, who, outwardly calm, writhed under her annotations and infusive genius of making a little go a long way when the object was Philip; and now, when every nerve was quivering with expectation and a portentous fear that existed without a name, and against her will, Imogene dreaded nothing so much as an impromptu laudatory discourse of Philip and his virtues. Would the time never come when she could hear his name inadvertently mentioned without an inward trembling and shrinking, that was daily becoming more difficult to conceal and harder to bear? Gladly she welcomed the first snow-flakes, for they heralded his coming to end her patient waiting.

"Welcome, thrice welcome," she thought, lifting her

eyes from the ruffle she was hemming, to look out of the window, where the advance-guard of the feathery storm was softly falling on the withered grass, and idly floating through the naked branches of the shivering maples.

"Such news!" cried Davie, bounding in and shaking the melting flakes from her mantle. "I just escaped the storm. There will be sleighing by to-morrow; but that's no matter. Susie scolded me soundly for not bringing you along, but I told her you were obstinate, and totally disregarded my commands. Thank heaven! there *is* a person in the world whose supreme behest you willingly obey. I'll pray him to exercise his magic spell, and tell us the secret of your dismal melancholy. It is lucky I went out, though, in the face of a threatening sky, else this blessed news would have been ignorance for the next twelve hours at least. Now, who do you suppose is in town!"

Imogene's head grew strangely dizzy; a sickening fear crept coldly around her thick-beating heart, and, bending lower over her sewing, she replied, in evenly measured accents, "I am sure I cannot guess."

"Why, Philip Shirley. Captain Shirley, of the United States Cavalry, came yesterday, and called on the Colburns the moment of his arrival. He is grateful yet, anyway; and making love to Olive, they say, in return for her father's kindness. There is self-sacrifice for you, with a vengeance; and all for sweet gratitude's sake. Pray, don't stitch your curls in your hem," recommended Davie; adding, somewhat pettishly, "Well, why don't you say something?"

"I am glad Philip is home, of course; but I don't see the necessity of going into raptures on account of his return," she rejoined, evenly as before, a slight tremor in the hand guiding the needle deftly in and out the fine cambric as methodical as if her stony eyes regulated the stitches.

It was merely mechanical, for she was unconscious of either feeling or motion. Lower and lower drooped the black ringlets, concealing the rapidly flitting hue of her cheeks, and the perceptible blanching of the tight-shut lips. Davie, if the most voluble, was the least observing mortal in the world. So innocent and open in her own nature that she had no suspicions of others, and little suspecting the mighty effort Genie was making to retain her color and voice, she was quite offended that she should receive the important information of Philip's return in such a provokingly quiet way, when she had been bursting with impatience to impart the startling news all the afternoon; in fact, she had cut her visit short, pretending that the impending storm compelled her to an early departure, for the sole purpose of letting Imogene know that Phil was once more at home; and her extreme serenity was too much for even Davie's good temper.

"You are a complete misanthropist, that you are, Imogene. I don't believe a visit from the man in the moon would arouse your apathy or excite your curiosity!" and with this final decision she whisked off, mentally vowing that when she bothered herself again to tell her anything she would know it — that's all.

The bloodless face of Imogene, raised the moment she was alone, would have caused her to change her mind regarding the interest she took in the news she had been so eager to impart. It was actually livid, ashy-looking, like the features of the dead, framed in a cloud of black hair, and lighted by two fixed, burning eyes, the parted lips pale to ghastliness. She put her hand to her brow in a bewildered way, looking utterly helpless, vacantly staring, and cowering before some horrible terror that rose up a giant of despair in her bosom, and left her abjectly crawling at the feet of the dread phantom that had so long haunted her peace. She knew its name now; knew that she was

deserted; knew that she was not first in his thoughts; that she was forever out of Philip Shirley's life, and consequently forever fated to grope in the shadows her faith in him had thrown about her path.

"Came yesterday!" the hollow voice sounded far away. "Came yesterday, and he goes to Olive Colburn for a first greeting. I am left to — to — oh, Philip, Philip!" She gazed blankly at the now fast-falling snow, and the wicked wish formed into words, "Oh, to be under it, so deep that his footsteps above her head were powerless to disturb her repose!"

Time had been when she would have staked her life on his coming, despite the storm; but now she did not look for him. The thought did not once enter her mind, and she went up stairs like one walking in a troubled dream, and all that wretched night she lay staring at the darkness, without a friend or counsellor in the world to help her bear the burden pressing heavily on her young soul. From the beginning Imogene had conceived a wrong idea regarding her duty toward Mrs. Lee. Ruth was in every respect a mother to her, but she had never given her the smallest share of confidence. From the first, Philip had usurped the tenderest impulses and the entire frankness of her being. Under his guidance her whole life was tinged by a false coloring, which destroyed her faith and blinded her reliance on every one else. She had been so accustomed to obeying and looking up to him as something superior to common humanity, that it became a second nature to reverence his simplest request, and abide by his decision, without a thought or wish of doing anything contrary to his desire. She had loved him so long and ardently, and had shut the secret in her heart so closely, that now, at his premeditated neglect, it gnawed into her soul. The bitter truth seemed written everywhere in letters of fire, and Ruth's kind eyes upbraidingly reproved her for the deep

duplicity she had practised on her confidence and charity. Double deceit and treachery, too late she saw it, and remorse came to add a new anguish to her already misery-torn heart.

And where was Philip? In Lot Colburn's elegant parlor, smiling beside the sofa of his gray-eyed daughter, and humorously discoursing of life on the plains. Lame Olive listened, with her hand in his, and her shy, white face seraphically pure in the soft lamplight. The stoical soldier did not notice the timid trembling of her hand, or the faint blush she gave him in reward for his spirited narration, not one word of which was more than a sound to him. Her little love was too weak a thing for Philip Shirley to understand, but to her it was a whole heaven of delight. She found her Eden in his presence, and though she was simple, lame, and sickly, little Olive liked to lie there on her cushions and love *him*, though he might never know or care for her unasked affection. Had Philip forgotten Imogene? Forgotten her! It was her memory that had so corrugated his young brow and settled the fixed sternness about his firm mouth—her memory, and the wrong he contemplated against her, that had laid the frowning wrinkle between his eyes, and deepened the austerity of his solid features to almost habitual harshness. How different from the boy lieutenant's was this captain's strong face, with the coarse moustache of crisp blackness, shading a lip that shut hard over white, even teeth, and met a severe chin in its downward droop.

Where had the boy-fun and frolic gone? What had dried up his sparkling spirits and faded his happy smile? It was hard to recognize Philip Shirley in this sadly altered, grim-visaged man, indifferently toying with Olive Colburn's thin hand. He had taken it, but he scarcely remembered that he retained it, so engrossed was he with his own reflections. He had come to Alden with a purpose, and it was

as fixed as his native hills. Ambition had drunk every other fountain dry. He had resolved to be great. A woman's love would hamper and retard his advancement. He must be free, and his progress untrammelled by the promises he had insanely made to Imogene. A soldier had no right to a wife. The wild frontier was no place for domestic affection, and a young officer, pitching his tent anywhere, ought not to think of marriage, and, after his rough experience, it would be unjust for him to drag a woman from her home and friends and expose her to the peril and hardships of life in a tent or ruder barracks. No, no; he could not think of a wife, especially a wife of no birth. Imogene was beautiful, and he loved her. He did not attempt to deny that she was yet dear to him; but she had no name, and he would not link himself to possible disgrace for the sake of obeying his heart. Love must be subservient to honor. Who was this girl whom he had madly loved past anything on earth? What her parentage? Where was she born? His conscience whispered, "Be true to your promise, let it be as it may; *she* is innocent, and the greater dishonor is in your base desertion."

Out under the stars, and Olive might never have existed for all the thought he gave her; but she smiled and kissed the hand he had held, and limped away to her chamber, loving the stout little captain a deal better than he deserved.

Philip, as has been seen, was devoted to his profession, and acknowledged no mistress save his sword; but, notwithstanding, he paused in his hurried walk, and looked at the Lee homestead, a kinder expression in his eyes, and an audible sigh on his lips. He shivered, but not with cold, and clenched his hand in muttered wrath beneath his heavy military cloak. The gaunt lilacs nodded mockingly at him, and seemed to point their bare branches derisively in his direction. The wind came freighted with a voice — her voice — calling to him from the dark old house, and

the chilling gusts swept down from the church-yard, bearing Elinor's soft accents above the roar. He stood a culprit before the visions of his guilty conscience, and the smothered cry of repentance the imaginary spectres called forth ended in a grating oath. He turned boldly on the old house, as if it were sensible of his defiant gaze, and hissed through his shut teeth, "By heavens, Imogene, you will not suffer alone! I could tear out my heart that it deserts you, but I will be great, if the way be strewn with death, and the murder of my own love crimson in my path." The wind howled anew, and whirled a dead leaf against his face. It felt like the touch of a woman's hand, and rustled like the soft motion of a woman's garments. He started, and cursed the wind, while he trampled on the gray leaf.

There is something lonesome in standing without a dwelling at midnight, when all is dark and still, the windows solid blackness, and the whole dreary aspect of roof and gables and chimneys, sharp angular deformities, thrust out in the gloom, to scare us into a greater state of nervousness, when we know a household is quietly slumbering within, and only ourself keeping vigil. This was doubly the case with Philip, who harbored an evil purpose against one inmate of the silent farm-house, which did not add to his comfort of mind, or serve to cheer the dismal appearance of her home viewed at the ghostly hour of twelve of a bleak winter's night. He could not endure the oppressive scene, and precipitately fled, followed by the guilty sense of a preconcerted injustice that was to ruin the young life of Imogene Vale.

CHAPTER XXII.

MISS VALE.

A CHEERLESS day dawned dismally over the snowy earth, and Imogene arose to meet it, proud, still, and despairing, like one who had nerved herself to know and endure the worst. Yet the impatient rap that at early evening sounded on the outer door made her soul fairly quake, and scared the blood from her face as rapidly as if Death had laid his touch upon her sinking heart. Well she knew who stood without, but she did not rise. Philip two days in Alden, and not come to see *her!* It presaged evil, and she had schooled herself for the ordeal of meeting him with the unpardonable slight, a mountain of injured love and aroused pride, between them.

Davie ejaculated, "Philip, upon my word!" and flew to admit him, demurely ushering the haughty little officer into the parlor with as much ceremony as if he were a full-fledged major-general and the hero of twenty battles. The heavy countenance he turned toward her in grim welcome chilled the glad glow burning in her own, and, excusing herself for a moment, she ran back to beg Imogene's aid in entertaining the grim captain.

"I came for you Genie; it 's Phil, but I never was so disappointed. You will hardly know him. Come along, and we will overpower him by force of numbers."

"Did he ask for me?" Imogene's voice, though sweet and low, seemed to come from some sepulchral place, and startled Davie into giving her a curious look. She met the blue eyes without a falter, and, forgetting her surprise, the other went on rather deprecatingly:

"No; he did not ask for you. I suppose he expected

to see you with me, as a matter of course, and did not think it necessary. He is awful stiff, and sits like a ramrod, on the extreme edge of the sofa, gnawing the most ferocious moustache that ever disfigured the lip of mortal man. His aspect is quite savage, foreign to anything we ever knew in *our* Phil. Why, he tried to awe me with his frigid stateliness, and I am not sure but what he succeeded, for I was never so glad to get away from any one in my life. There is one comfort left, at least: we can be as severely polite as he, and freeze as solid on short notice. Let us be revenged, and astound him by our supercilious manners. Be your haughtiest, and I will play second. You are incomparable when it comes to the grandly icy airs, and I long to see the conceit taken out of him. The pitiable notice of poor Olive Colburn has completely turned his head. Do come, Genie; a look from you will take him off his guard, for it 's all assumed and superficial, I am certain of that," cried Davie, trembling with eagerness to see Philip annihilated by the prouder spirit of Imogene.

There was an ominous glitter in the black eyes when she calmly arose to comply.

"If Captain Shirley desires a formal reception from his old friends, I will not be so ungracious as to deny it. If he thinks to humiliate *me* by his studied neglect and feigned asperity, I 'll show him his mistake."

She shook back her hair, casting a single swift look at her matchless face in the glass as she passed. It was never in better beauty; the tremor, and pallor, and anguish was out of it; the proud heart alone ruled the splendid eyes; nothing like love was there; her only thought was to resent the insult she knew he had purposely put upon her. Davie considered it capital acting, and softly applauded, greatly enjoying the anticipated fun of Philip encountering her cold, firm look, one colder and firmer than she had ever seen before. Heedless of her murmured admiration, Imo-

gene entered the parlor, and, bowing low before the agitated officer, said in steadiest accents:

"If Captain Shirley will accept our poor congratulations, we gladly welcome him home again."

Philip started as if that quiet lady-voice had been a blow. Her manner was easy, collected, and dignified; nothing more. No covert resentment, no disguised bitterness — simply indifferent. It stung him deeply, but he managed to conceal his feelings and offer his hand. She gave him the tips of her quickly withdrawn fingers, and waited for him to speak.

"Miss Vale's welcome I prize next to none in the world. I think she must know it."

Imogene again bowed in acknowledgment of the implied compliment, but her look was scornful.

"Indeed, I see Captain Shirley has not forgotten how to flatter." Her cold, skeptical smile made him extremely uncomfortable. She had forestalled him, and, instead of tears and reproaches, greeted him in haughty disdain, and a frigidness ten times greater than his own. He had meant to be politely constrained at first, and gradually thaw into argumentative confidence after the first chill on his part was over. Philip had laid his plans without a thought or provision for Imogene's non-acquiescence, and her sudden change of tactics baffled and surprised him. Davie found it convenient to leave the parlor, shrewdly divining that she was one too many when people were so very circumspect after being the best and most inseparable friends, and the two were alone — Philip sitting ill at ease on the sofa, and Imogene leaning carelessly against the piano, the room between them. Neither spoke for several minutes, but her eyes went straight to his in a long, searching, questioning gaze.

"Imogene!" he was by her side, and holding out his hands.

"What is it, sir?" She still retained the hardness of tone and expression, regarding him almost sternly, without noticing his outstretched hand.

"I do not seek to justify what you doubtless term, and rightly, my reprehensible conduct, but I would —"

"Pray do not defend yourself until you have been accused," she interrupted, freezingly. He had never called her Imogene before, and it rankled deeper than his coldly enunciated "Miss Vale." "Or do I see verified in you the trite adage, 'That a guilty conscience needs no accusing.' No excuse is necessary, sir. The rumored stories of your grateful devotion to Miss Colburn is sufficient explanation in conjunction with your marked avoidance of myself. I desire no other answer, and, as a lady whom you have purposedly shunned, I can ask none."

"I know your moods too well to believe your heart is in your words. It is your pride speaking. It shall have its way; then I will appeal to the love I know lies beneath. You can't cheat me by so poor a semblance of scornful indifference. This is a sad meeting for our hopeful parting."

"And whose fault is it?" she turned on him sharply.

"Mine, Imogene; my fault alone — yet I had reasons."

"Reasons, indeed; most laudable, no doubt, and worthy of Philip Shirley."

"Oh, the old bitterness!" he said, with a sigh. "The old, sneering, bitter spirit in full power; but 't is justly aroused this time, though not as regards Olive Colburn. She to steal in my heart to your casting out! Why, Genie, your shadow is dearer than a score of pale Olives. If idle gossip has been busy with her name in connection with mine, do not believe it, for the tale is utterly false. Olive cares not a pin for me, nor I for her, save as a passing friend."

He gave her a frank, half-smiling look, that reminded her of the past. The mist which unbidden dimmed the

firm black eyes softened the flashing anger in Imogene's. Love him? She could have fallen at his feet, and kissed the very dust beneath them, yet, strange anomaly, she answered coldly, without a sign of tenderness:

"Since I am forgotten, what matters the cause? why refer to the past or allude to the parting, which you colored with promises so seeming fair, that I, poor fool, lived and believed in them only? This wretched meeting is of your own making. I am hurt to the heart, I admit; but you shall not remember me as one who had not the womanliness to resent the outrage you have wilfully planned and carried out toward me. As to Olive, I simply pity her. I fear no rival; I demean myself by the word."

She impatiently drew away from him, her beautiful face angrily animated, and the brilliant black eyes bright and tearless.

"You are splendidly handsome in your wrath, as you are sweetly gentle and confiding in your love. You see I am not to be intimidated by your beautiful fury, for I have seen you in hot tempers before, and your lofty scorn goes for nothing."

This was too provoking, and Imogene fairly trembled with rage. His self-confident manner, though perfectly natural and every bit like the commanding and exhorting Phil of her whole life-worship, was not to be endured now, and she retorted, in suppressed anger:

"Dare you mock me with your contemptible allusions to the love which was too high, complete, and pure for a creature like you to win or understand."

"But *I* did win it, I *do* possess it, and understand it so thoroughly that I know your heart is, like my own, crying out against this miserable farce we are acting. I don't mock you, neither do I wish to stab deeper the breast which I have already cruelly wounded. I am guilty, but not of loving any other woman better than you, Genie. I

will explain, but not now — not here. I must see you alone, and where there will be no danger of an interruption. Meet me on the rock near the hickory-tree this evening at seven, and I 'll tell you the truth — everything — then blame me, if you will."

"A clandestine meeting after dark! Does Captain Shirley seek to compromise me?" she asked, in withering doubt.

"Imogene, I have carried you in my arms a baby, and love you a cursed sight better than I do my soul; and you shall not, by look or word, nay, by so much as a thought, fear to trust life, honor, or reputation to me. I am a gentleman, by heavens! and you shall not intimate the contrary. Will you meet me on the rock to-night at seven?"

The request was more like a command. She did not answer, and he sternly continued:

"You are shrewd enough to avoid suspicion, and frame an excuse, for once."

Her lips curled in wordless disdain.

"I have already lost my own self-respect in practising cowardly subterfuges on those who love and trust me. At your bidding I have stooped to vile evasions, and readily acted falsehoods at your supreme behest. I presume another lie will not matter, since you are a *gentleman*, and desire it."

"Your sarcasm is irritating."

"I will be there; you will excuse me for the present. Shall I send Miss Lee to you?" broke in Imogene, going to the door.

"No. What do I want of Miss Lee? Do you mean to drive me mad? At this moment I could both kiss and strike you," grated Philip through his shut teeth.

"Allow me to suggest that it would be neither brave nor prudent for you to indulge your soldierly as well as lover-like propensities in Mr. Lee's parlor."

She bowed derisively, and appeared to enjoy the intense pain of his strongly agitated features.

"Give my adieus to Miss Lee; and don't be too harsh, Genie," he whispered, the last close to her cheek, and dashed from the house, swaying along like a drunken man. He had meant it all to be so different — had meant to kiss away her tears and reproaches, and argue her into seeing things as he did, and accepting his views as right, and all others as wrong. Instead of a weeping girl, he met a stern, proud woman, beautiful, strong, and not to be readily appeased, who could obey as a first, but rebelled as a second in his love.

Imogene's hands fell from the door-latch, and, clasped together, dropped lifeless before her, vacantly staring at the spot where he had stood, as if he had vanished through the floor.

"Fond heart, you may break, but you shall never bend; the haughty spirit that broke my mother's shall now save mine. I 'll not perish for any man's desertion, though he be Philip Shirley, and — and —" she paused abruptly, and left the room. Meeting Davie, she said:

"Philip left his adieus for you, and the next time he calls keep him all to yourself, for his dignity is beyond my comprehension."

"Was my lord prince Shirley so gracious as to remember simple me in your royal presence? I am most humbly grateful. You two were so prodigiously formal that I ran away, thinking perhaps you might thaw if left alone. Did you succeed in unbending the vain little wretch, or is he past redemption?" quizzed Davie.

"Past everything, as far as I am concerned," placidly replied Imogene, quietly taking up her sewing.

And so ended the sanguinely anticipated meeting of two years before. How different that bright picture from the sad reality of this! Boyhood's bright fancies were over,

girlhood's dear vision vanished, hope exiled, and love silenced. Imogene's heart hardened at the change, and Philip repented his rashness, yet stubbornly determined to bend her to his will.

He knew his power, and how easy it was for him to recall his angry subject. The heart of the child was the heart of the woman, and it was his, had always been his, to hurt or comfort as he pleased, and the mere uttering of her name in the kind old way would bring her sobbing to his arms. An hour with him alone, and she would be the sparkling Gypsy he remembered so well, and not the cold, scornful Lady Imogene of their last interview. He little dreamed that his power was on the wane, and that voice and smile and touch would soon be unable to re-establish her insulted love. The dark abyss was just before him, and, although he stood on its dangerous verge, he did not see the fathomless gulf yawning at his heedless feet. He said a word too much, and his life's happiness retreated beyond his grasp. He tried her heart once too often, and she took it back to her bosom in disdain that it had so long been the slave of Philip Shirley.

CHAPTER XXIII.

PHILIP EXPLAINS HIMSELF.

THE wind howled dismally through the trees and swept freezingly down from the bleak barren hills to sob a moment in the more protected valleys before shrieking up the dreary mountain-side, miles and miles away, as Imogene hurried to the tryst. A feeble moon shed a pale light over the snowy earth, leaving lonesome-looking dark spots along the fences and at the base of the grim old rock. Philip was there, impatiently striding up and down under the gaunt limbs of the great hickory, as restless, obstinate, and discontented a being as ever quarrelled with his own stubbornness, or wrestled with a sin which he hated, yet excused, and was prepared to defend. It was cold, very cold, but the blood in Imogene's veins was boiling. She felt it throbbing hot to cheek and brow, and almost suffocating her quick-beating heart. The warm worsted hood she wore oppressed her heated brain, and she tore it off, crushing it between her trembling hands as if the pretty crimson thing — the latest delight of Davie's deft fingers — had deeply injured her. Notwithstanding the young officer was looking for her, she came upon him unawares, the soughing of the wind deadening her light footfalls. Without a word she stopped before him, and, as she had done all her life, waited to know his will.

"Put on your hood," he said, anxious for her health; "I fear you will take cold."

"Cold," she repeated, bitterly; "I wish I were so cold that no earthly heat could ever warm me."

"Hush; this is madness!"

"No; this is sanity. The other was madness."

He turned away from her flashing eyes, and when he looked again she was standing in the same attitude, but her face so strangely altered that he hardly knew it, pale and expressionless like that of a statue; the black hair pushed back, and the white brow, half in shade, half in the light of the sickly moon, left the set features smooth and marble-looking, like a dead woman's. It alarmed the bronze-faced soldier into a hasty gesture and exclamation.

"For heaven's sake, don't look so, Imogene! Let me explain. Let me show you our error. You must not condemn me unheard."

She never stirred a muscle, gazing straight at the lot where the buckwheat had bloomed, filling all the air with perfume, that summer day so long ago. The hand partly holding, partly grasping the mantle across her breast, kept its exact position, not an eyelash moved, the dark, shining eyes seemed to grow brighter and larger, and he thought her partially averted face appeared sharper and more distinct as its fixedness became more rigid and protracted. He could not bear it, and opened his arms. "Come, Gypsy!"

Her head slowly turned in following his voice as we have seen the head of a dying horse respond to the caressing tones of his master. The familiar name struck the tender chord, a stifled scream broke involuntarily from the poor, ashy lips, and she fell into his arms helpless as an infant. He saw the large, dark eyes slowly closing, and felt how weakly the small white hands crumpled against his breast, trying, in the loving child-way, to clasp them about his neck; but they were powerless to reach the prompting of her heart, and instead were almost crushed in his strong, nervous grasp. Philip's tears and passionate kisses were on her brow, she was close to his broad bosom once more, his breath on her lips, and the one beautiful and perfect love of his rough, boisterous boyhood warm at

his heart. Imogene did not think it so hard to die, and almost wished that her soul might find its wings and flutter away to the cold, star-gemmed heavens while his heart was pulsing against her cheek. Philip had yielded, but not repented of his firm resolve to break away from the love which conquered him, even while he strove to neglect and banish it, as something that would chain him to a morbid fear, the source of which was Imogene's questionable birth. He had thought of it a great deal, and in imagination depicted the humiliation of hearing dark hints assailing his name through a nameless wife. He would never marry, but from the lofty height which he meant to gain he would look down on the jarring masses, and congratulate himself on his freedom, consoled by the knowledge that in all the world there was but one woman, and, despite the outward seeming that he had tasted of affection deeper than most men receive from women, he would always love her — ah! always dearly, truly, and completely — be hers in everything but giving her his name. So argued the pliable sophistry of ambitious youth, and no doubt Philip believed in the wisdom of his reasoning, and thought himself a model of consistency at the time. Building on his old influence, he meant to persuade her into his way of thinking, and in a logical manner impress her with a proper sense of how embarrassing it was for a young officer to be followed about in camp and field by a wife. He had seen it in a few cases, and it sickened him of ever dragging a woman around eternally with him. Life on the plains was not refining for men, and it hardened women in the same degree. He would explain it clearly to Imogene. She had always deferred to his judgment, and he was sure she would in this. Only it was a little more delicate, the rejecting of her hand and love, than anything he had ever attempted before. At all events, she must know the truth, and to that end he solemnly said:

"As God sees us this moment, Gypsy, I love you better than anything else under heaven; but, in the face of this assertion, I am going to ask you to forget all that took place two years ago."

"What, all the promises, the sacred vow that neither you nor I can—"

"Yes, everything; they were rash promises, idle vows. It were wiser to forget, or remember them as childish and impracticable," he hastily interrupted, pulling at his moustache in dire perplexity, for he did not like the expression of the two wild, affrighted eyes staring at him in appalled wonder.

"And how have I displeased you, Philip?" She withdrew from his supporting arm, and stood very still and calm beside him.

"In no way, but I want my freedom; you have it, and I came to ask it at your hands. The world is ignorant; let it remain so. There must be no secret shackles of this annoying kind to impede my progress. It irritates and makes a very devil of me." He stamped his foot and frowned, walking about and returning with another stamp and frown. She regarded him sorrowfully:

"Why should the poor tie that binds us so fret and anger you, Philip? Was it of my making? Can I undo it?"

"You can be silent. We were mere children, and neither of us are answerable for the past. Ignore it, Imogene, as I do; for I cannot fulfil the blind promise which, kept, ruins all that I am striving to obtain."

"Ignore it!" she echoed, interlacing her tremulous fingers. "I don't understand you. I have lost my Philip in this hard, pitiless man, who comes here to break my heart that it is faithful, and will not recant; that, too, in the very spot where we played as children, and wished away the years that should give us to each other. Oh,

Philip, it hurts me to hear you call the love which you gave me the right to confess the folly of children, for it is more, the worship of your soul and of mine, and will stand first in our hearts until they are incapable of mortal affection."

"Nevertheless it was an egregious error, innocently committed I know, without comprehending the misery it might entail on our future; and all we can do now is to expunge it as speedily as best we may. I'm too poor, I can't support a wife, especially one like you, educated, refined, and accustomed to ease and comfort. The uncouth, illy-dressed, and uncultivated women of the frontier would disgust you in a week, as they did me. My beggarly pay hardly keeps me from being threadbare. I have no home — no money — and preferment yet to win. How can I make good what would naturally have been the result of our last —"

"Oh, don't speak of that; nor sneer at our trusting youth; our real sin commences here!" Her attitude and voice were pleading; the wistful eyes earnest with a new and sudden entreaty. She would not let his love slip away; would not let the evil tempter triumph without a struggle to maintain her hold upon his heart. She did not fear to enter the lists with the foul fiend himself, when the object was Philip Shirley's wavering love, and clung to the last desperate hope of disabusing his mind of its new, unnatural wandering, with a woman's frantic beseeching. "Oh, Philip, I can't forget, I can't school myself to your false way of reasoning! Don't give me up; in Christ's name, do not. It will kill me! I have loved you so long — have trusted you so fully — have obeyed and believed you so implicitly, that this wretched ending I cannot bear! Be merciful, Philip; dismiss these arrant, unworthy thoughts, and keep with me our holy vows." She fell on her knees, this proud, beautiful Imogene, and lifted her clasped hands imploringly, the wild supplicating face white with agony,

humbly begging from the cold snow at his feet the return of his recreant love.

The stout soldier shivered, and well he might, for his inward soul worshipped the splendid creature praying him to be true to himself and her.

"You unman me," he said, attempting to raise her. "I feel myself a demon in temper, and a poor devil incapable of taking care of you, should I listen to your entreaty."

"Oh, don't let the pitiful plea of money separate us! I will wait; wait years — all my life — until prosperity comes. We will work for it — yes, work, hope, and wait for it — if you will give me the old love for my courage and faith. I don't care for poverty, hardship, or danger, Philip. I'll bravely face them all — anything but our eternal separation."

Rendered half frantic by her tender pleadings, Philip forgot himself, and uttered the fatal words that shut against him the affections of the woman whose love filled his heart, and the long agony of regretful years began. He had meant to spare her the great and potent reason of his resolve; but in the face of her prayers he felt it to be the only silencing objection in his power to offer, and arousing her pride, she would be her haughty self, and leave him free to act as he might choose. Not venturing to meet her gaze, he said, a sort of dogged determination in his manner:

"There are other considerations beside poverty and hardship, which you seem to have entirely overlooked. My wife must have a name, her parentage must be above questioning, her social position unblemished, and free from doubt."

A moment after, he would have given his right arm to recall the cruel words; but it was too late. The bitter taunt went straight to her heart.

"*Say that again,*" she whispered, a ghastly smile on her

lips, and a terrible shadow in her eyes, that made him shudder to behold.

"I do not wish to pain you; but I repeat that the woman I call wife, however humble her lineage, must be above reproach. You have forced the truth from me, and that it wounds I am heartily sorry, for you are innocent, God knows; but that fact will not satisfy the world, nor the doubt in my own breast."

Imogene recoiled a step backward, and her laugh, bitterer than ten thousand curses, echoed through the stillness. She began to speak mockingly, but lost it in a vehement outburst of subdued passion, terrible to see and hear in one so young.

"And so, brave Shirley, *your* wife must have a name; and you dare stand there, you vain, conceited upstart, and utter this to me. Who am I, sir? more than your equal, for I have kept the faith that your worldly heart has deliberately broken. You talk of honor with a lie in your throat; you prate of family distinction, and your father a ragged, illiterate farmer. Think you I pay homage to the captain's sword dragging at your egotistical heels? I have loved you better than my Maker — better than the dead, whom you insult — I confess it; but not because I thought the time would come when you might strut in a colonel's coat. I've been a fool — stupidly blind. I must have time to think. Meet me here to-morrow at this hour."

A flowing, black dress, and a white, haggard face fled past him, and Imogene was gone.

Philip sullenly regarded the spot where she had stood, looking the picture of one who had made a great and irredeemable mistake. "I thought I knew her," he muttered, "but I never did. How could I, when I don't know myself? Am I always to be self-tormented in this cursed manner? I think Elinor Vale must be stirring in her grave at my base treason to her child. 'Be kind to Genie.'

I wish to heaven I could forget it! She has been dead these years, but I vividly remember her look and voice, and just the way her head lay against the cushion of her chair when she asked me to always love her little girl. Well, I always have loved her; she can't upbraid me there, selfish as I have proved myself." He clenched his hand, and strode to and fro like a caged animal, but he never faltered in his mad purpose of renouncing Imogene; and as he walked about, enraged at himself and hating the part he was acting, he looked like some malicious fiend bent on death and destruction to himself and everybody else. The short, heavy figure seemed a deformed monstrosity, malignantly cursing the life that he was sacrificing more than life to exalt. His features looked old and hard; the deep-set, gleaming eyes fierce with self-engendered passion. The gray dawn found him still there, and the snow beneath the hickory trodden into deep defacement by his quick, angry footsteps.

And what of Imogene? The girl fled home like a frightened deer, never pausing until she bounded into the presence of startled Davie, breathless, white, and trembling.

"Ah, how strange you look! — where have you been, and what is the matter?" were the rapidly uttered questions of the wondering Miss Davie.

"Out, making calls; been everywhere, from heaven to hades. I was frightened at the lateness of this wind-swept night, and ran; that's all."

"You are in a singularly gay mood, I must say, and looking like a mad ghost," said Davie, regarding her attentively.

"Am I?" A nervous little laugh and shrug accompanied the words, steadily meeting the puzzled blue eyes, her own more black and bright than ever.

"Well, if you were afraid, why didn't you ask my company?" said Vida, somewhat reproachfully.

"Because I fancied a run alone. Don't stare, I 'm not a lunatic, though I suspect there is a mild species of lunacy in my queer nature. But never mind; half the world is mad, and the rest imbeciles. Come, let us have a song. I can sing to-night. Music is refined madness, and love a universally believed-in raving of the heart."

She dashed at the piano like a maniac, proving that at the moment love and music were with her indeed madness.

"Goodness knows, you quite astound me!" remonstrated Davie. "For mercy sake, save the keys! It is splendid though, if it does smack of Bedlam," she added, after a moment's rapt listening.

"It is a passion, like me. Did I not once tell you that I was a wild, restless torrent? Here it is. Hark! how it dashes among the rocks; roaring now through dark, dismal gorges, groaning in lonesome caverns, toying with the pure pretty rivulet; that 's you, Davie; here is the tempest, the furious storm-cloud bursting with fierce, deadly lightnings, the crashing thunder, the last vivid blaze of mortal agony; now come the moans, and shrieks, and tears, followed by remorse, despair, and death! Do you hear? Do you comprehend that all these grand combinations of fearful seminals are in the soul of Imogene Vale?"

The instrument, faithful to her marvellous touch, gave forth a flood of sound corresponding with the words of the dangerously but gloriously gifted girl. The rapid changes bewildered and frightened Davie.

"Are you crazy?" she gasped. "You play as if some evil spirit possessed you!"

"No; I am only intoxicated with my own power. This genius ought to win a name, and it shall make me famous. A motion of my hand, and I fascinate, charm, or scare. Now listen, and I'll sing you the song of the nameless, improvised for your sole benefit, Davie."

She began a sweet, impassioned medley, that gradually

became sublime. Her voice trembled, the prayerful plaint mingling with the music sad and low. Suddenly voice and instrument were silent. Her head fell forward on the keys, where her cold fingers yet lingered — the singer had fainted. Davie showed sterling qualities on this unexpected occasion, and, without alarming any one, she ran to the window, threw up the sash, seized a handful of snow from the sill, and vigorously applied it to Imogene's temples so plentifully and effectually that she was on her feet again before Davie fairly understood the situation. Laughing hysterically, she tried to explain:

"The room is warm, and I am tired; here, fill my hands with snow, they are burning. You were sensible in not calling for aid; now, be generous, and don't tell any one of this foolish weakness of mine. There, the tremble is out of me, and I guess I 'll keep my senses the rest of the evening. No more improvising; no more music for me to-night. Trill your little, soothing ballads; Davie, I am going to find Aunt Ruth."

She flashed back a smile as she departed that quite reassured Davie, and she forgot in the soothing ballads Genie's strange mood and her own alarm.

CHAPTER XXIV.

RUTH IS CROSS-QUESTIONED.

IMOGENE went, as she had said, in quest of Mrs. Lee, and found her in the east bedroom, carefully putting away the weekly linen. The open bureau-drawers and basket of neatly folded clothes indicated that Ruth was pleasantly busy, for nothing pleases your thorough housekeeper so much as the laying away of a nice ironing. A solitary candle, burning near by on the stand, did not give a very brilliant light save in the immediate neighborhood of the basket, and being so deeply engaged in patting and putting away, she did not hear Genie enter.

"Aunt Ruth!" Mrs. Lee nearly dropped the sheet she held at the sound of the girl's low voice, there was so much constrained feeling in it.

"Why, child, what in the world ails you?"

"Nothing." Again came the sickly laugh. "I have been thinking a great deal lately, and I came to ask you something. Let me help you put away the things."

"But we can't talk here, child; it 's too cold," remonstrated Ruth.

"Wrap this shawl about you. I'm not cold; and I would rather speak with you here than elsewhere."

Mrs. Lee felt a dread presentiment whither all this preparation might tend, but passively allowed her to place the heavy shawl on her shoulders, curious, yet fearful of the conversation that would ensue. Seating herself in a chair by the frosty window, Imogene quietly drew another directly before her, bending forward so as to read her face, and, suppressing the excitement under which she was evidently laboring, folded her hands in a listening attitude, and said:

"Now, Aunt Ruth, tell me about my mother — all — everything you know, and how her character impressed you."

Mrs. Lee had long expected something of this kind; but she started at the actual request, which, in Imogene's present state of mind, was like a command, as if she had not before anticipated the question.

"It is little I know, dear," she replied, after a moment's thoughtful hesitation, "and it were better to let the past of us all rest."

"Your evasion of the subject does not satisfy me, aunt; I must know the truth, be it ever so little. It is a strange, sad history, with nothing comforting in it; but I long for every particular as anxiously and earnestly as if it were a pleasing story for you to tell and me to hear."

"Your mother came to us in a peculiarly strange manner, and on the topic of her youth and early girlhood was sensitively reticent. I never urged, and she never volunteered a full explanation of what was undoubtedly a very sad history. Only twice did she ever allude to it; once, just after her first severe illness, and — and the hour she died. You interrupted her last attempt to give me her entire confidence, and death left her unable to unravel the mystery."

"But you believed her to be a lawful wife?" asked the girl, searchingly.

"Imogene, you are speaking of your mother," rebuked Ruth, more sharply than she was aware.

"I know it," returned Genie, quietly. "Of my dead mother; and that I do speak so is because the arrow is deeper in my heart than it will ever pierce yours. The mystery of my birth I will know, if it takes years of toilsome search. Tell me truly, what did my mother appear to you?"

"By me she was ever esteemed and loved as a gentle,

refined, heart-stricken lady, and that she was pure — a lawful wife and mother — I believe, as firmly as I know she is now in heaven."

"But the proofs — that 's what the world will have; else 'Who was she?' will descend to me a perpetual blur on her fame. My poor, injured mother! *I* know her purity, and, by the eternal heavens, I will vindicate her name if I find perdition in the seeking." She struck her hands forcibly together, her eyes blazing, and her face a carved stone of feeling. Ruth regarded her shudderingly.

"Oh, my child, do not give way to such evil passions. They are unavailing to reach the truth, and only serve to render your thoughts morbid and your life unhappy. Try and overcome this mad tumult of conflicting doubts and suppositions. She died here in this room, giving you to me, and from that hour I have been the richer in another daughter. I almost feel her presence now, and see her white, thin face on the pillow, fair and seraphic as it used to look. It laid there so long patiently dying, watching sunset after sunset, and counting the hours that should give her rest, that in imagination her gray eyes are always turning lovingly toward me when I enter this room. As I promised, I have tried to fill her place, Imogene; and as my heart dictated to my own have I given to her child." Imogene softened, and pressed her lips to Ruth's quivering chin.

"Indeed you have been a mother to me, dear aunt, a kind, indulgent mother. With your own blood have I equally shared, and that so delicately that I have never felt the sting of charity; and I — I have not been a daughter to you, I know, and sorrow for it; but it is too late to correct the past. I have closed my heart so long I do not think it can ever open to the most forgiving confidence. My nature is seared and contracted by a wrong guidance at the beginning, until now there is more gall than the better part of me can sweeten."

Ruth scarcely understood her meaning, but she stroked her hair, and in a gentle, confidential way told her every word the dead mother had spoken in relation to herself and to the future of her child: everything that had the slightest bearing on the momentous question of her troubled life was faithfully imparted. Elinor left little besides conjecture to expound the enigma. It was all misty guessing, and Imogene listened like one who was convinced, but far from satisfied.

When she had finished, Genie crossed her hands on her knee, and, looking wistfully in Ruth's saddened face, said, impressively: "Remember, in thinking of me, remember it always, aunty, that if I had known myself better, I would have given you my whole duty and love. Think of me as a poor, self-willed child, who, though she wronged, yet deeply loved you. Think of her as a headstrong, distrustful woman, lovingly and forgivingly, needing your prayers and long patience. The shadows are so thick, and I am not myself to-night. The incessant brooding over the phantom of my miserable being has soured and perverted both love and gratitude. Forgive me, Aunt Ruth; let me go to my bed this night with your blessing."

She humbly knelt beside Ruth's chair and laid her head in her lap with the meekness of a little child. Mrs. Lee was greatly moved, and both hands went down to the young head in whispered blessings, a prayerful complaint mingled with her tears, more to the dead than the living:

"Oh, Elinor, the time has come, and but for my love I am incapable of comforting this young, troubled soul! Poor child! poor lamb! beauty, genius, everything but a contented spirit."

"Don't cry," said Genie, wiping away Ruth's fast falling tears. "I am not worth crying about. My troubles are of my own creating, and I ought to bear them alone. I'll not forget what you have told me. Good night." She

kissed her tenderly, and softly went away to her chamber, and immediately retired, quite an unusual proceeding with Imogene, for she was in the habit of walking about, looking out of the window, lifting this and putting down that, after going to her room, in a fashion that Davie declared made her half crazy.

Philip pacing under the hickory, Ruth anxious and wakeful below; of the three only Genie slept. Mrs. Lee could not sleep, and, as she had done when they were children, crept up stairs to make sure that all was right with "the girls." Davie gave a disturbed sigh of partial wakefulness at the slight sound of the opening door; but Imogene slept on heavily, a deep, lethargic slumber, the reaction of her overstrung nerves, profoundly tranquil and natural. Genie might have been the happiest creature in the universe for all sign her face gave to the contrary As usual, Davie was nearly cuddled out of view under the bedclothes; she had a deep-seated dislike to a freezing temperature, and anything like a degree below zero sent her precipitately out of sight. Her bedfellow, on the other hand, delighted in plenty of cold air and ample breathing space, and now lay high upon the pillow, a mesh of soft black hair curling around her white temples, and two small pink-palmed hands folded on the counterpane. The frost was glistening thick on the window-panes, and they looked so white and tender. Ruth feared they would be cold, and gently placed them under the covers. Useless precaution; they were burning hot, in keeping with the feverish glow of her scarlet cheeks. Davie stirred again, and snuggled her pretty lily-and-rose face close to Genie's neck — an old nestling habit of hers — which in no wise disturbed Imogene. The light-measured breathing of the two young creatures fell like holy music on the watcher's ear — the dark, proud beauty of the one, the sweet fairness of the other, a pictured repose that Ruth never forgot, and

never saw again. No, never again did she stand by the bedside with the two young faces radiant before her, and ask heaven's blessing on their unconscious slumber. Surely angels must have been there and recorded that last time in their pitying tears. It is moments like these that make our sacred memories, and counterbalance the sin and inconsistencies of existence. So Ruth construed it, and, thanking God for that beautiful sleep, left them to the angels.

CHAPTER XXV.

ELINOR'S GRAVE.

IT was a clear, bright morning, and immediately after breakfast Imogene, equipped for a walk, slipped out the back door, and, unobserved, made directly for the cemetery. This silent city lay on a sloping hillside, picturesquely interspersed by gravelled walks and shaded nooks. In summer all those frozen heaps of snow were green and flower-decked, overrun with myrtle, fragrant with roses, and starry with daisies; but now, in the cheerless winter, the paths were unbroken from the last storm; a single brown spot of crumbled earth near the gate, telling where some poor mortal had been laid to rest since it fell, was the only blot on that broad expanse of whiteness. The dense evergreens, snow-crowned and motionless, stood like grim, imperishable sentinels guarding weak mortality. A bleak, dreary place is a church-yard in winter, the tall shafts pointing upward, and the snow drifting down on white monuments, until it seems as if the pale hands of the dead were rising to brush it away from their hushed bosoms, and all the voiceless multitude proclaiming against its pitiless weight. The

white covering made every path indistinct; but Imogene knew the way. Her dress, brushing among the shrubs and low, flat ceders, sent showers of sifting snow from the heavy-laden limbs, but she did not notice or heed the sombre aspect of her surroundings. The sun, shining coldly on the adjacent hills, and glimmering over the naked woods beyond, looked colder than the snow itself, glaring on the trees and haystacks and fences as if pleased at its own feebleness. The solitary figure traversing the lonesome way did not pause, or lift her head, until she came to a plain headstone standing alone except for the three little monuments on the left. The snow was so deeply drifted about the base that the brief inscription was partly obscured. She stooped down and scraped it away with her hands, and there it stood, cut deep in the stone:

ELINOR VALE,

AGED TWENTY-SIX.

"I have found rest!"

She died young. Her cross was too heavy, and she meekly laid it down here on the hillside, and found the longed-for rest. Imogene knelt and kissed the name. The frost in the marble made it painfully adhere to her warm lips, and this not uncommon phenomenon filled her with the superstitious belief that the poor dead was sensible of her caress.

"Even my mother's lettered name clings to me, and my kiss on her tombstone answers my breath with instant fondness," she murmured. A leafless rose-bush that, in summer, bent under a load of white blossoms, but now boasting only a few red berries, lightly came in contact with her sleeve. She started; for it was like the slow touch of her mother's hand. Oh, that poor hand, so long buried, so thin and wasted before it died! The feeble hand that now rested like a reproach on Philip's head, had not yet lost its gentle

influence. The rustle of a rose-bush recalled it, and the unhappy child folded her arms across the top of the simple slab beneath which her mother slumbered, and, lifting her eyes to the chill blue sky, evoked the aid of her parent: "Spirit of my dead mother, guide me! Direct my steps; I need your counsel and love; show me where to walk, for my feet are stumbling! Thou knowest who planted the thorns, and made my heart as desolate as this shrouded landscape. His baseness I could have borne, and counted neglect and desertion as nothing; but his cruel slander of thee I will avenge. I come to your grave for strength and guidance, mother, that you might be near and he afar in this, my holy hour." Her head fell to the clasped hands, and she stood quite still, her face hidden in her mantle. A few snowbirds hopped in and out among the firs, and one, more bold than the rest, regardless of the silent form, began pecking at the red berries of the rose-bush.

It might have been five minutes or twenty; she did not know. She heard nothing, saw nothing, until the subtle instinct that warns us we are not alone, impelled her to look up. A dark shadow lay athwart the mound, and there, on the other side of Elinor's icy grave, stood Philip Shirley. The military cloak, muffled close about the chin, concealed the lower part of his features, leaving only the deep, unfathomable eyes visible. He did not utter a word, nor offer the least apology for his untimely intrusion. His keen gaze seemed computing the length and breadth of the lowly mound, without bestowing a glance on the indignant mourner. Imogene's wrath instantly kindled, and the insulted blood surged back to her heart in an angry tide.

"How dare you desecrate this sacred spot with your polluting footsteps?" she demanded, sternly. "The nameless daughter of the nameless dead bids you begone. The heritage of pride that crushed her living is my birthright,

and it shall protect her dust. If you are not quite devoid of shame, leave me and the poor defenceless mould you have falsely traduced."

Cut to the quick, the discomfited officer bit his lip, and deprecatingly motioned her to be silent.

"In God's name, hush! your tongue blisters the very air," he adjured, looking more sorrowful than angry.

Imogene lost nothing of her severity, and continued:

"Cross my path when and where you may, Captain Shirley, you will never find me humbled. Remember, to-night, at seven, I shall await you."

The crisp snow yielding beneath her rapid tread was all the sound for a moment; then it was still again, and Philip alone in the church-yard.

A sudden something had urged him to Elinor's grave, and something stronger than his will, for he did not care to go, and in following the small foot-prints he had no thought of whither they directed, or of whose feet had made them. Yet here he was, facing Imogene's rage, and viewing her mother's tablet, without clearly knowing how he came there. He was glad to be alone, that he might live over again his first and last interview with Elinor. "You will be kind to Genie when I am gone, Philip?" How distinctly the words came back through the lapse of years! Her hand was on his head, his head upon her breast. He was a boy again, and crying at her knee. Elinor had predicted his future greatness, and in the same breath had prayed him to be kind to Gypsy. Surely she could have spoken only wisdom with the death-mark upon her, and possibly may have foreseen what his kindness might lead to. Mechanically his fingers began tracing the chiselled letters, spelling out the name without the aid of the sharp, bold eyes. The folds of his cloak, hanging half over the stone like a pall, did not altogether conceal the

workings of his broad breast, nor the quick, distressful shiver that ran over him from head to foot.

"Great God, have I come to this!" he cried, despairingly. "That I should stand here a guilty wretch despising myself — a cringing culprit shrinking before a bit of decaying earth that was once a woman, with eyes like a dove, that are looking at me yet. I see the moonbeam across her feet, and smell the odor of the autumn flowers. Self-accused, self-condemned, self-accursed! Here and now, I will cancel the evil thoughts and commence anew. I'll play the traitor no longer! I'll go back to first principles and redeem the past. After all, my heart has never been in this miserable apostasy. I will be kind to Gypsy, and keep through life every promise I have made her; in making her happy I throw off this incubus forever, and am Phil Shirley once more. I have been mad, for, deny it as I will, Imogene is the best of me. She is my conscience, the dearer half; and, if fame comes, we will share it together. I can't withstand her influence. To plan in Arizona and act in Ohio are two very different things. I won't have a grave reproaching me, any way — a white-faced woman continually on my track, that I know has been dead a dozen years. I am as brave as anybody, but I am not equal to fighting shadows, nor breaking a woman's heart. Yes, I'll lift Genie with me, and sink the obscurity of her name in the glory of mine. Why did I not think of it before? What have I not endured since I looked in her eyes last night? I ought to have known, without this terrible experience, that existence is a farce, and aspirations a wreck, where she is not! It is all right now, thank heaven; and when she will, I'll show the world my beautiful Gypsy — wife."

Thus Philip settled it with his conscience and Imogene, never doubting her willingness to excuse his queer conduct, or dreaming that the spell was broken and she no longer

under the influence of his magic wand. But he had this yet to learn, and struck out briskly for home. The fight was over. He was ready to meet Imogene with the old love, and impatiently awaited the evening.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE TRYST.

PERHAPS Captain Shirley would have been a little less self-confident if he had known how determinedly Imogene had set about abjuring him. She was prepared to meet him, not in tender supplication, but fearless defiance. She would never forgive that inadvertent allusion to her mother, vowing, with inflexible purpose, that Philip might conquer the world, but he could never remount the throne from which she in contempt cast him down. The wheels of the Juggernaut had gone over her idol, and it lay crushed at the foot of the pedestal, never to be again worthy of the old idolatry.

To avoid suspicion, she informed Davie that she thought of spending the day out, and they need not expect her to tea. It was often quite impossible to evade Davie's uninvited company, and seeing she was about to offer the same, Imogene added quietly: "And while I am gone, I'll be so much obliged if you will finish that bit of worsted-work of mine. You know I don't like to touch fancy wools, and I want the sofa-pillow for Susie Johnson's Christmas present."

Davie looked a little disappointed, but readily accepted the task. The unsuspecting, obliging little soul comforted herself by mentally resolving to astonish Genie by the

number of flowers she would do in her absence. Imogene was particular in her dress this afternoon, and was a long time about her hair, tying it all back with a rose-colored ribbon, that left her face free of its heavy abundance.

Her dress was black, her hood and mantle crimson, the soft, flannel-like texture just matching the glow of her cheek, and became her beautifully—so Davie said, and she was a good critic. The last thing she did was to slip on her finger the serpent ring. Davie did not see it; only Genie knew the talisman was there, and she hugged the hand that wore it to her bosom, never relinquishing the pressure until forced to remove it before meeting the gay greetings of the lynx-eyed Susie, but it lay in its velvet case above her troubled heart all the time she was responding to the diversified gossip of an afternoon visit. Never was Imogene so brilliant. She sang and played and laughed and conversed in a merry, social way that quite astounded those who thought her reserved and supercilious. She admired everything and everybody, and made herself so charmingly agreeable that she even interested deaf old Mrs. Johnson, and sympathized with Susie's many flirtations.

Seven o'clock found her at the foot of the rock, and the ring again on her finger. Unobserved, she saw Philip, standing as he had stood the night before, with the moon, brighter than last evening, shining on the hickory limbs, and casting leafless shadows on the ground. Not a breath of wind to-night; not a cloud in the star-studded zenith. Nature lay stark, frozen, lifeless; not a sound save a frost-snapped twig, and a dreamy chime of distant sleigh-bells. The moon, sailing far up in the blue-vaulted sky, seemed anchored in its voyage to witness the sequence of a man's rash folly and a woman's perverse pride.

Her step was firmer as she drew near; as if, to fortify her heart and maintain a proper haughtiness, it were necessary to assume a stern demeanor. Philip came to

meet her, and, as she kept her hand close under her mantle, he laid his on her shoulder, and, regardless of her severe deportment, said, with the same sturdy frankness with which he used to confess his boyish faults:

"Imogene, I am the better for my visit to the hillside this morning, and I am sorry I said what I did about — about what I never meant to say. Forgive the reflection, Genie. Forgive whatever hard thing there may be in your heart against me. I am here willing — more than willing — to make the past good, and live up to it in act and word."

Here was her triumph! Phil was himself, honest and earnest. Her heart recognized her old *ci-devant*, candid, imperious lover in the glance of his unflinching eye, and the ring of his clear, melodious voice. She could not speak for joy, and turned away that he might not see the fierce delight in her eyes.

"You are kind," she said, mockingly. "Your condescension should be rewarded. I am sorry I cannot imitate your magnanimity. And so you are willing to 'make the past good?' Most generous of you, indeed, sir! and I freely confess my admiration."

"I would not try to be too satirical, Genie," he replied, without a sign of resentment. "I expected your sarcasm, and am not going to mind it a bit. I acknowledge you have the best of me in this case; but it 's not our first quarrel. You have scratched and pinched and bit me ever since nature gave you teeth and nails. I never was far behind you in these necessary youthful accomplishments, and, when every other persuasion failed, shook you into good nature; but, out of respect to a long dress, I 'd rather not do it now. So, let us kiss, and call it square."

A look of disdain was all she vouchsafed him, and Philip went on as if he had not seen it.

"You know I love you, always — and only you! But a

pernicious demon of ambition got hold of me, and the pertinacity of the thing, and the countenance I gave it, is something I wonder at now. I am inclined to think that the devil had the upper hand, and, instead of being so cross, you ought to smile that I am rid of the old fellow. We could make up in three minutes if you only would, and then I 'd tuck you under my arm, and see you home regular village-fashion, and we would have a pleasant evening with Davie. Let me see your eyes, Gyp; they are the barometers that used to guide me just before and after a storm. I have often measured the length and depth of your anger in your splendid eyes, sweet, and will venture it again. The heart that can't forgive, is not a woman's. I lost my wits, and you caught the contagion; but it is nothing serious, and, as ever, I put my faith in your love!"

"Take it back, then, for I do not love you."

She was very straight and still, keeping her eyes away, fearful that they might betray the relenting that would have come but for the ring rising and falling on the hand upon her heart.

"Pooh! yes, you do; as if I did not know Gypsy! Loyal and true, I have asked your pardon, and I now claim —"

"Nothing of me, sir," she broke in, harshly. "Have I sunk so pitifully low in your estimation that to-day you spurn me like a dog, and to-morrow sicken me with your fulsome attempts to caress and flatter? Am I that thing so low, so utterly degraded, that your flippant pity bends your worthless pride? You boast of understanding my nature, but you fall far short in your reckoning if you ever expect me to believe in your protestations again. I tell you, Philip Shirley, what was love has turned to wormwood, embittering every tender emotion; and you profess to know me, with your puerile air and words! I wish my tongue was adequate to express the utter loathing I feel for your mean assumption of contrition."

The withering scorn of her look and voice did not disturb Philip's equanimity, and, not in the least nonplussed, he replied, with great composure: "I will venture my commission that you are dying to cry this minute, and almost on the point of surrendering."

"Cry! Do you think I have shed a tear since the snow drank them here at your feet? You struck deeper then, than you have power to heal, and the wound is mortal."

She was trembling with anger, but Philip interposed firmly: "Imogene, hear me."

"Not till *I* have done. You have changed me to a demon woman, and you need not to appeal to my heart, for it is a barren desert — not one green thing in the waste you have created. I fling from me the old time, and the old affection. I lift my heart from beneath your treacherous feet, and take back my poor remnant of love. I am not bowed. I am not forsaken. You are unworthy, and I cast you off. A weak woman might die, but a strong one will live. The mendacious monster you call ambition has not quite destroyed my reason nor self-respect, and I withdraw from your dangerous favor the wiser, but not the worse, for your perfidy."

"Now, Imogene —"

"Not yet; you shall hear my mind, and then we part forever. Nameless — am I? my mother's honor maligned, and *by you.* Her fame questioned — a defenceless woman in her grave — her life misjudged, and myself contemned, because I am her child — and dying, left me, unknown and fatherless, to meet the vile suspicions of men like Philip Shirley. A goodly hero, I trow! A most noble soldier and gallant chieftain! I bow to the generous spirit, and reverence the exalted lineage from which he sprang."

A mocking bow and smile accompanied the derisive words, stinging her before complacent companion into a

savage retort that ill accorded with his heretofore good nature.

"A curse on your sneering raillery; I will not bear it even from you."

"But you must," she returned maliciously. "You humiliated me here, and here will I have revenge. Good heavens! was it *I* who knelt at your feet only last night, and craved to be restored to countenance? Oh, how I hate myself! If I knew where ran the coward blood that could so demean me, I would open the vein and let it out before it should dishonor me again. You offer to make good the past; now listen: I swear before high heaven that I would not be your wife to save the universe from destruction and my own soul from eternal annihilation. Thus I hurl back your scorn, and brand you false and cowardly!"

"By heavens, woman! I will not tamely submit to your outrageous invectives! I will not"—

"Soft. I face you with a spirit fearless as your own, and do not tremble at your scowling wrath. My life is not worth the spilling, therefore do not tarnish the snow with the pauper puddle."

"Your insinuations are enough to make a man swear himself to the devil; but if you *will* keep up this useless tirade, in the name of Satan go on, and the sooner you scold it out the better. I'll pray for patience, and control my temper, if I can; but don't tempt me too far." Considering the state of Imogene's mind, this speech was doubly tantalizing, and exasperated her into the very acme of an acrimonious retort that made him wince in spite of his inward resolve to endure whatever she might say in philosophical unconcern.

Imogene was literally white with passion, and confronted him with rage-quivering lips and a scathing malediction in the flaming black eyes. Philip drummed his foot on the ground in a way that might be construed into a challenge

for her to proceed, or an indifferent intimation of reconciliation. Imogene, however, was thinking of anything but a renewal of their broken friendship. Advancing a step, she lifted her hand—that white, womanly right hand, that God intended should be raised only in blessings—tremulous with fierce emotions. It shook above her erring head like an aspen, pointing the depth and vehemence of her scorching ebullitions.

"You jeer at my birth, and you, like myself, a beggar! Educated by charity; elevated by a rich man's eccentricity to the bounty of the Government; fostered on the country to slay and maim—truly a glorious career—hangman's work on a grand scale! Steep your ambitious sword to the hilt in human blood; strew death, desolation, and ruin in your track; mount to greatness through the tears of widows and orphans, heralded by their groans of despair, and bannered by their garments of woe, black as the night of their sorrow! Satiate your lofty aspirations in the shrieks of war's dying victims! March to renown over the mangled remains of thousands of bleeding wretches! Win immortality by filling all the land with mourning and the blighting of innumerable hearts and homes, and call it *glory!* This is fame; this is victory; this the exaltation you seek! A shame on your manhood, a ghoul to mankind!"

"Hold!" he cried, authoritatively, wrathful in his turn, a darkling gleam flashing from the kindling eyes. "Do not drive me into forgetting that you are a woman, at least in semblance—a very Proserpina. I wonder how your heart can distil such venom."

"Through the laboratory of your falsity," she hissed, contemptuously, with a smile that partook of the hiss.

"You have spoken; now hear me," said Philip, decisively, planting his heavy figure directly before her, like one who meant to be heard and would not tolerate an interruption. "I know you have cause to be angry, and there-

fore I accept your harsh denunciations as a merited punishment for what was the most cruel and selfishly wanton act of my life. But there is a limit to all things, and you have gone far enough. I have come to make reparation, not to alienate still more your affection. It is already bad enough. Here is my hand; won't you take it, Gypsy?"

"Never!" She pushed away his extended hand, recoiling from it, as if to touch it were contamination. Philip looked hurt and worried. Imogene did not shrink from the magnetic, almost sorrowful, eyes that fixed themselves rebukingly upon her. The full, penetrating gaze, though it did not conquer, restrained her from replying. She did not droop a lash, nor change color, but she saw the softening boy-smile creep to the man's bearded mouth, and slowly merge into the brave, bright eyes, where the fond, old love lingered yet. Phil's eyes! Phil's smile! Dear Philip! The name was in her heart — nay, on her lips. Involuntarily she closed the hand, that all this time had been pressed hard against her bosom, to suppress the sob she felt coming with it. The ring cut against her finger. It reminded her of the solemn vow that heart had taken. Imogene was iron again, and the precious moment gone.

Philip did not dream of how the serpent was beguiling her, though so far from their Eden, and determined on one more overture, hoping from her silence that the fire had burned itself out never to be rekindled.

"Is it peace, or will you repulse me again? You know you belong to me, Gypsy, and I claim but my own." He attempted to draw her to him, but she warded him off with outstretched hands. The moonlight caught the jewelled ring, radiating like a blaze.

"Where did you get that?" he demanded quickly, surprised beyond noticing her hasty repulsion of himself. She laughed nervously.

"Look at it," holding it toward him — a spot of blood

on a perfect hand — "study it well, for it contains a history. Can a Shirley boast a gem so rare? It is a little thing, made to fit a woman's finger and chain her heart; yet it is the dividing line between you and me, a mighty obstacle that your loudest acclamations of undying love cannot surmount. The *éclaircissement* of what is past, and for which you say you are sorry, is not sufficient to eradicate the stigma you have put upon this bauble. Remember me as always being guarded by an asp, for it is the crest of my father's house, and my mother wore it honorably. She affirmed it with death-palsied tongue, and I, her child, stake my soul that it is true. She left me only this — a serpent that might sting those who dared to traduce her memory, a heart that shall bleed until justice be done."

Philip regarded the girl in amazement, evincing no disposition to avail himself of the pause that ensued. Imogene was thoughtful a moment, and then resumed, looking upward, as if registering her purpose on high:

"I swear, by the memory of my sainted mother, that I will vindicate her virtues. If dead lips cannot speak, I'll tear the truth from living hearts. If this be the token that sunk her name to vulgar comment, it shall also be the emblem of restoring it to fairest fame; and my father's daughter, speaking through Elinor's child, calls heaven to witness the vow. I dedicate my life to its accomplishment, and will never weary until her rights and mine are established."

"Imogene, you don't know what you are saying. You are talking wildly, and I can't accept it as serious. I was a brute to mention your parentage in the way I did, for your mother's memory is my all of religion, my one ideal of a perfectly spotless woman, my one idea of angels, my one belief in heaven, my single interpretation of God. I am a heathen without the pure recollections of Elinor. I found *her* forgiveness before I left yonder grave, and came

away in peace and hope. You are tired out trying to be that which you are not. Be calm and considerate now, and let me set myself right as far as I may in your present mood."

"Speak!" She folded her arms, signifying her willingness to listen. The great black dilated eyes fell from his face to the snow, hiding the inflexible determination that no pleading could soften.

"There is a spirit within me that demands more than I can give. It demanded you, Imogene, as a first sacrifice; but I could not do it, though I tried. It is powerful, and succeeded in persuading me that, to be great, I must be free, and in my wife must seek a fair, open, ancestral descent; but I loved you without it, and we will be happy without it. It is a sad, pitiable part we have been playing; let us forget it, and commemorate anew this 5th of January. Did you think of that, Gypsy?"

"Did I think of that!" She only repeated the words after him, like an echo, but the pain in her voice and the sudden whitening of her face told how keenly she remembered.

Philip could not bear that look of intense suffering, and again offered his hand.

"Come home to my heart, darling; you have been exiled long enough, and your place is here."

She hesitated for a moment, but only a moment. "You shall not mutilate my soul, and then think to kiss the wound. I am nothing to you, and you are worse than nothing to me."

"Nonsense, Gyp, to so coolly condemn me to celibacy. If you are to continue thus obstinate, I shall never marry."

It was a wretched attempt at jesting, and her lip curled ominously.

"*You* marry — *you* keep a promise!"

No words can depict the scorn of her look as she said it.

Philip instantly hardened. There was no mistaking her gesture of intense disgust, and he did not choose to seem altogether pliant. A sleigh flew by with a joyous ring of bells, and a fragment of gay laughter — swift hoof-beats trotting along the road; two happy young lovers, tucked to the eyes in white robes; the cold, clear sky and frosty air. Only two years ago, and this was the 5th of January! Both started, for the sleigh-bells spoke of other days, when they were all in all to each other. Philip sighed, and Imogene listened wistfully. All was still again, and, with a shivering shrug, she said:

"I feel prophetic."

"Well, then, prophesy," returned Philip, curtly.

"I will; and predict that the time will come when you will beg for what you last night threw away."

"That is a stupid prophecy, for I have done so already."

Imogene gave no attention to this pertinent remark.

"The time will come when your plebeian name will be too obscure to mate with mine. They say I am beautiful. I know it; and it is a beauty that will bring princes to my worship. I am gifted, too. Genius wins homage, and I can afford to lose yours. Go your way, Philip Shirley. Freely I give back your promises. Only you and I, and God, know their solemnity; but they were not worth the breath that uttered them. I go out of your life from to-night, a grave of dead hopes in my heart; and you, though you may not forget me, will grow callous and godless, finding too late that the eagles were not worth scaling the eyry to possess. I have been in the habit of calling the gray old house of David Lee my home — a fallacy like the rest. I am but tarrying for a while until I see my way clear."

Philip caught his breath in real alarm. "Don't think of going out into the world, Imogene. I know something of it — a whirlpool that swallows up beauty and destroys

youth. To think of you homeless and friendless — oh, Gypsy, I could not stand that!"

"To wander poor and unprotected, like my mother before me. It is but meet, and the Scriptures are being fulfilled. It is written that the sins of the parent shall visit the child, and as my mother was deserted, so am I."

He grasped her arm sternly, like a master who would curb a refractory pupil.

"Enough of this, Imogene, it is too serious for trifling. You shall not, do you hear? *shall not* turn your back on the love and safety of your home, to drift, God knows where. I will use my authority in this matter, and say again, you must yield to me."

Notwithstanding Philip's severe aspect, she haughtily shook off his grasp, and contemptuously replied:

"You have insulted, outraged, and wronged me. It is forgiven, but I can't forget. Were fifty hells the consequence, I would accept them rather than return to your thraldom. I would reject heaven if it were offered by you, and disdain happiness at your hands."

"Be calm, Imogene, and hear to reason."

"I am calm; I am reasonable. The first hot rage is passed. We are not enemies; neither are we friends; we are simply strangers. You will gain your meed of praise, no doubt; and I wish you joy of your Dead-sea apples. You have won the fruit, and may it satisfy! My childhood was a part of yours; my girlhood a reflection of yourself; and this, my premature womanhood, the handiwork of Philip Shirley. Look at me well, and remember, to your dying day, the face that conceals the agony of a murdered heart. In tent or field, remember it. In the heat of battle and the flush of victory it will rise up the one reproach; and from out the past Elinor's spectre hand will reach forth to sting the laurels that, green to the world, shall be an upas to you. Plant your banner where you

may, draw your sword in whatsoever cause you will, yet from this moment be forever haunted. I could pity you, had I any pity left. I can only repeat, go your way, and leave me to follow mine."

Philip arrested her apparent intention of departing and ending the inauspicious interview without further recrimination, by promptly stepping before her.

"There is an element of persistency in your nature far more implacable and cruel than mine, heavily as I am cursed in that respect," he said, reprovingly. "I am not to be angered nor scoffed into permitting you to leave me in this state of mind, and, before yonder moon sets, you must say you are sorry, and own up that you love me, for that you do I know as well as that I am standing here."

"Never! I'd cut out my tongue if it dared to so degrade me."

"Oh, you wild-cat! now see how impotent your rage," said the audacious captain, coolly picking her up, and covering her face with kisses. Bewildered by this unlooked-for bit of strategy, Imogene did not affect to struggle, but lay resigned in his arms, too confused for any immediate resistance. Evidently, Phil was surprised, for he had expected a tussle as a reward for such a very summary proceeding, and, being a good soldier, he was not going to be taken off his guard by a feint.

"Now, don't be cross," he begged, laughingly. "A spunky woman is the very deuce to appease, unless it is strength *versus* temper."

She made no answer, and thinking he had over-estimated Miss Vale's fighting qualities, Philip's arms relaxed. She remained quite motionless, and but for the bright, wide-open eyes, looked and lay like one unconscious. There was a little self-vanity in the smile hovering about his mouth when he said, "You talk, and I act; now ain't you sorry, Gypsy?"

"Villain!" She sprang fiercely to her feet, and half struck, half pushed him from her so violently that he stumbled, and but for the fence would have fallen prostrate. A devil of passion leaped to Philip's eyes; he turned like lightning, and, by a single blow, struck her to the earth; not senseless, but stunned, and whiter than the snow. Oh, what would Philip Shirley not have given to recall that second of time! The suddenness of the blow, and the act that provoked it, paralyzed him into momentary faintness, and sick, and helpless, he leaned against the tree for support.

What had he done? He was afraid to look at the still figure on the ground. In pity the long, curling hair veiled the cold white cheek, creeping from the bright hood on its errand of mercy to cover the pallid brow, and hide the expression of the stony eyes. Faint almost to unconsciousness, Philip cowered beside the tree, unable to speak or move. He was hurt by far the worse, and looked as a murderer might, viewing the scene of his crime.

Imogene was the first to recover, and quietly regained her feet, with the blood slowly dropping from her mouth. She had cut her lip in the fall, and the ghastly stain soiled all the snow where the pale face had lain. She feebly raised her hand, marred by the shuddering blood-spots, and glittering with its rare old jewel, and put back her disordered hair. She turned to look at him — strong, noble-hearted, miserable Philip, with his face concealed, all but the large brow, in his cloak, stifled moans breaking from his great bosom, and the stout, hardy, vigorous frame trembling. Still looking, her hand kept smoothing the rebellious hair, perfectly unaware of what it was doing, and from vacant, her eyes became thoughtful, then pitiful, and at last tender. In Philip's greater suffering, Imogene had forgotten her own, and smiled, oh, horror! she actually laughed, to find herself capable of tender pity again for — Philip! She came

softly nearer, a woman's love in her voice, and a woman's gentleness in the hand she laid upon his shoulder.

"I am sorry *now*, Phil! I am sorrow for you." Her arm went round his neck in the way it knew so well, and she kissed the little space of cheek the muffling cloak left visible. "We are parted, but as I hope to be forgiven I forgive, and the love that was so hard in dying is forever peacefully dead." He felt a tress of silky hair brush his forehead, the removal of a slender arm, and he was alone.

The soldier, crouching by the tree where he had once dreamed of fame and fought the battle of the squirrel, a little black-eyed girl for confidante, sobbed alone in shame and sorrow.

"I would rather have died," he groaned. "Fiend, devil! what have I done? She drove me to it. I tried to forbear." Starting up, he called frantically, "Gypsy! Gypsy!" He made a mad plunge down the icy bank. "Gypsy! Gypsy!" But there was no answer; no one was near. He was alone in the wintry solitude. Retracing his steps, he gained the brow of the rock, and the man who had never before known fear, quailed at sight of a little blood upon the snow. A spot no bigger than his hand, yet it seemed to widen out a sea of crimson at his feet, that imagination could never make less. He clenched his hands and beat his brow in a savage frenzy of remorseful regret. The paroxysm of rage burst forth in muttered curses, prayers, and oaths against himself and heaven, so deep and awful that would have frightened the most wicked to hear.

"Blood will always follow your footsteps." The wind, or some other spirit of the air, brought the words to him. Twice had the mark been upon her by act of his. He would efface this, and springing to the spot, he trod it fiercely into the ground, leaving only a dark space of dirty, trampled snow to tell where the most deplorable act of Philip Shirley's life had been committed. Not satisfied

with this, the madman struck his closed hand against the old hickory with a force that sent the ragged bark trembling to the earth in scaly crumbles. Until the moon set, he paced the narrow circle of its branches, and turned his back on it at last with a bitter imprecation on the secret it possessed and the sin it had witnessed. And Mrs. Shirley could have told that after his return from the unpropitious tryst, Philip walked the floor all night, muttering and acting altogether like one demented, and that next day it was as much as your life was worth to so much as look at him.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE MIDNIGHT VIGIL.

IMOGENE never knew how she got home that evening, only that she managed to get up to her room unobserved, where she put away her outdoor wrappings, bathed her face, and smoothed her hair, all very quiet and natural, as if nothing unusual had occurred. Davie came in, surprised to find that she had returned, while she had been troubling her little soul that it was so late, and Genie might be frightened again coming through the bleak night alone.

"Well, I am glad you are safe back; I was just worrying about you. Did you have a nice visit?"

"Oh, delightful! I don't think I shall ever forget this charming day."

"I knew you would like society, if fairly initiated. I finished your work—a Christmas present—a week after New-Year's; but better late than never. Just see—three rosebuds, a lily of the valley, and four leaves; ain't they

nicely shaded? I am greatly your superior in blending colors, Genie," holding up the work and admiring it on all sides. "I thought of you every stitch, as glad as I could be that you were having a good time."

"Dear, kind Davie! Susie shall never have this work. I'll keep it myself in memento of the blue eyes that were busy over it the day I was so happy." Imogene kissed her, and placed the brilliant square of worsted in the topmost drawer, where her precious things were stored. "I am dreadful tired and sleepy," she remarked, after a brief silence, forcing a yawn that was too prolonged to be natural.

"Well, that is queer. I fancied you never got sleepy like other mortals. If I was old Morpheus, I would feel vastly complimented. I have often been tempted to search pharmacy for a somnific potion that should rival the famous snooze of Juliet," said Davie, beginning to let down her blonde braids, and taking out a hair-pin between each word, as if they were periods and merited a full-stop.

"Long, fair hair," said Imogene, twining it through her fingers. "Poor Juliet's nap was sadly disastrous to her love; sleep was fatal in her case."

"No; it was not. Romeo killed himself too soon," defended Davie. "Sleep came out all right. In the language of the poet, or somebody else, 'pison did it,'" she laughed.

Genie did not participate in her lightness; her mind was on a different tack, and said, musingly: "I believe the fair are always good."

"You forget Lucretia Borgia and Queen Elizabeth."

"Oh, I do not mean the extremes," returned Imogene, gathering up Davie's straight, golden, light locks, and laying them against her face. "How would I look with such angel tresses? Did you ever hear tell of, or see pictured, a black-haired angel? I think not; we make the devils!"

"Why, Genie! and I just going to say my prayers," reproved Davie.

"Well, it is true. Painters always insist on making the bad, vicious, murderous women and angels dark, beautiful, but suggestive of Erebus, divinities of the Plutonian shore, banished by birthright from the brighter sphere. I'm of the lost sisterhood; so what is the good of praying? You are shocked; but I am wicked, Davie. I feel wicked all through me."

Imogene dropped the braid—wavy strands of gold, and gloomily fell to contemplating her own image in the glass above the dressing-table.

Davie was so hurt she could not speak for a moment; and, not knowing what else to do, burst into tears. "Oh, Genie, how can you say that, when you had a sweet, gentle mother, who taught you that our Father's love was alike to all his children? I would not have such b-a-d th-ough-ts," said Davie, with a final sob that scattered thought into half a dozen sighing syllables.

Imogene whirled around sharply: "Where is my mother's God? I am stiff-necked and distrustful of his mercy and justice. Show him to me, and I will adore. I doubt, Davie, I doubt everything."

"I'm not wise, like you, Genie; but I think, if my mother were dead, that I should find God in her memory, and believe in heaven that she were there."

"Oh, Davie! Davie! you little know, you little dream that—but never mind. You reason from a sinless heart, I from one embittered. I'll not wound you again; there, brush away the tears, and let me kiss you in token that I am sorry I caused them."

Davie complied, and a moment after was curled down at the foot of the bed, methodically saying her prayers. She seldom ventured on anything original in her limited orisons; it was the same little formal "Now I lay me down to

sleep," learned at Ruth's knee, interlarded by a brief allusion to a few particular personal friends, and sometimes a casual reference to extra transgressions incurred through the day. On this occasion she solemnly added a codicil expressly in wicked Genie's behalf; after which she felt vastly comforted, and jumped into bed, satisfied that the naughty words were blotted out of the celestial book that recorded Imogene's terrestrial sins.

After she was asleep, which was not many minutes after her head touched the pillow, Imogene placed the candle on a chair near the shunned window, and, kneeling down, laid the ring on its blue woollen homemade cushion, and, with her chin in her hands, looked at it long and earnestly. "Here is the only key I have to the mystery," she muttered. "Who was my father? My mother never spoke of him as dead, and never harshly. Proud and hard-hearted like me, he killed the gentle creature that he must have loved well enough to intrust with his name and this crested jewel."

She took from her bosom a little packet of letters, the cherished correspondence of those two hopeful years, and held them over the candle until consumed. Collecting the bits of black ashes, she scattered them from the window, and saw the last vestige of Captain Shirley's bondage borne away by the wind. He had asked for freedom, and she had given it. "So much toward complete renunciation," she thought. The forced composure gave way, the pent-up agony would come, and, twisting her hands one over the other in acute distress, she wept as only a woman like Imogene could. Davie would have comfortably whimpered herself to sleep; but this sorrowing girl, fighting and disowning her sorrow, was of a different nature, and as she had stormily looked her misery in the face and defied it, she now succumbed to the returning wave of love and grief. The ship was wrecked, but she mourned the fair

pennant still floating high above the breakers, and these the tears she gave to its loss: "Oh, Philip! Philip!" She covered her mouth to stifle the groan rising in her throat, and prone upon the floor struggled with her woe.

The candle sputtered, a charred wick in a dismal, unsteady blaze, and waveringly went out. Darkness or light was one to her; she did not miss the sickly flame. When the great sobs were exhausted, she arose, stood irresolute in the gloom an instant, trying to recollect where she was, and then drew up the curtain. The moonlight rushed in, and showed how blanched her face had become in the darkness. She disrobed in a hasty manner, as if just realizing the lateness of the hour, when, in fact, she did not know what she was doing. The curtain was still up, and she sat down on the bedside, utterly lost, and unable to define where the sobbing wretchedness left off and this drear apathy began. The truth is, she was almost frozen; the chill crept upon her unawares, the drowsy numbness, and she was at a loss to know what ailed her. To recover her dazed faculties she commenced walking up and down, which put the stagnant blood in circulation and restored full consciousness. She was deadly pale, haggard, and shivering. The white night-dress, shroud-like in its clinging length — the tender feet, pressing the gaudy stripes of the carpet, perfect in their fairness as the sculptured limbs of a marble Grace. It was a frenzy of despairing passion — the last mortal throes of love, and faith, and hope. It was a proud heart humbled and battling with its wounds. It was a strong spirit exhausted — an ill-used and most aggrieved woman, expiating the anger which, though just, she yet regretted — thankful for the blow that gave her the opportunity of returning a kiss. "The blow I forgive, Philip," she whispered, as if answering a question. "All injustice to me I pardon; but I will never, *never* forgive the shame that you thought of my dead mother. No;

I'll hold that against you eternally." She hardened into the girl who had maddened Philip under the hickory, looking and acting as pitiless as then. "The iron is in your soul, Philip Shirley, and there let it corrode until your ambition is satisfied. Both our natures are capable of infernal cruelties, and if we make our hearts a hell, no doubt we shall be able to endure the fire. I think delighted devils must howl approvingly over us, for we certainly merit their commendation." Even alone she laughed ironically, and snatched the ring to her lips so savagely that the blood followed the fierce act. "Twice have my lips bled to-night. *This* comes from the first wound," she sneered. A drop fell on the ruby heart, splashing the emerald head of the viper: the diamond eyes seemed darting fire — the tongue lapping gore. The whole minute but perfect thing appeared to stir. It was only the action of the uncertain light, but Imogene held up her hand and addressed it as if it were alive, and as potent as the one Eve conversed with to the everlasting detriment of her daughters. "That is right; warm into life, and hiss out the knowledge you possess and I would know. Oh, if these cunningly-arranged gems could speak, then mystery were at an end! Oh, summer, will you never come? France, land of my birth, how I long to press thy soil! These white fields, the ghostly woods, the old brown house, I would leave them all! Oh, my grave, out there cold and lonely, will it never grow green again? How long must I wait for the coming of spring? How long watch for the flowers? Patience, heart! Mature thy wings before attempting flight. Let me think; let me plan."

The kitchen-clock chimed two, and with the last stroke she sighed wearily, and again took a steady survey of herself in the glass. The moon was setting, and the image reflected was but a faint outline of white, overshadowed by a pall of splendid black hair. The motion that put it from

her face was spectral, the loose drapery of the sleeve a phantom glimmer.

"Royal beauty!" murmured the poor bruised lips; "and he was proud and fond of it. I only prized it for that. It is queenly — all the dower my father bequeathed me. Good men will adore, and good women admire and envy it. I am wicked and heartless enough to protect it. It is only the good, and loving, and gentle-natured to whom beauty is fatal. A handsome face, a graceful form, gifted, well educated, and without a heart. With these endowments I will boldly wage war with the world. Kingdoms have been won and lost for less. I 'll peril it, anyway, on the hope of establishing my mother's honor, and the bowing of one arrogant spirit. Fate will open the way, and then all will be easy. The conflict is over. See, spectre of the glass, how calm I am! I can repeat his name without a tremor. 'Philip, Philip, Philip! Dear old Phil!' I can even repeat it tenderly, and I 've not attempted the lesson before. Child love, child companion, dear — no I can't bring my lips to say that word, it is too hideous a mockery. I dare not."

She lost something of her jeering manner, and came back to the softer mood:

"Gypsy is calling Phil; don't you hear? Loving promises, whispered in dear old nooks, come fresh to my memory unbidden. Do they to you, Philip? I am under the lilac, lamenting the dead. I am on the rock, owning my faults. I am running to meet you in the lane. I am resting on your bosom. I am slumbering in your love. I am Gypsy; you are Philip; not the fiends who struck and glared at each other to-night. My Philip died on the plains, or somewhere in those wild, remote regions. This fearful likeness of my darling is not him. We are both dead. I buried myself last night. I cannot analyze this second being. We have not been acquainted long enough

to be rightly understood. But I know I shall not droop or sicken. That part is for saintly characters, like Elinor. I came of a stock who proudly live through trouble, and bear their sorrows without repining. We rake the ashes over our desolated altars, and say there has never been a fire. I am stone — a little spot of affection left for Davie and Ruth, that 's all. In the general ruin I have not lost gratitude." She bent over and kissed Davie. "She cried for me, and she cried for a squirrel. Bless the sweet innocent! I wish I were as good as Davie." Imogene crept into bed just as daylight crept into the window, so cold that Davie, even in her sleep, rebelled against coming into contact with such a clod. Genie was sensible of her frigid condition, and generously kept as far from Davie's warmer latitude as possible. Cold and miserable as she was, Imogene's eyes closed, with hands clasped peacefully across her white, young bosom, and face at rest, in the sublime wonder of sleep — a woman with a dead heart, a dead faith, and a dead religion.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

DAVIE GETS A GLIMPSE OF CUPID.

MOST women, after enduring the intense mental and physical inquisition that had marked Imogene's night of cold and suffering, would have come from the ordeal wan, hollow-eyed, and spiritless, and feigned headache as an excuse to escape the breakfast-table; but not so this strong, indomitable girl. She was up as soon as Davie, and made her toilet with extra care.

"Is not your lip swollen, Genie?" carelessly queried the ever astute Miss Davie; "seems to me it looks queer." Imogene quickly pressed her mouth with no gentle fingers to dispel the illusion. The action gave her acute pain, but she did not betray it by so much as a wink.

"Frost-bitten, I guess," she said, lightly. "I kissed a bit of cold marble yesterday, and it clung to me fondly in return for the greeting I trudged bravely through the snow to give it."

"Did you go to the cemetery yesterday, when I missed you so long?"

Imogene nodded.

"No wonder you were out of sorts last night. Those gloomy evergreens, dismal sextons that never die themselves, and snow-covered stones, viewed early of a freezing morning, would have killed me, so icy and pathless, and all the graves bulging up higher and longer than in summer, with a skeleton bush or flower-stalk trying to make itself visible in the centre. I was there once, and saw a frozen grave, dug for a frozen inmate, that the half-frozen sexton covered with frozen clods; and since, I never attend a funeral in winter. It is different in summer; but leaden

skies, voiceless birds, and leafless trees make me afraid of death."

"My mother is there; but beyond the cold and gloom you fear."

"I know it; but she was buried in autumn—in the gold of Indian summer. Don't you remember that the late daisies were white along the way? I do; and you walked sedately with Philip, and I so scared that I dare not speak."

"Ah, yes! Philip was my comfort then. I was a child in trouble, and he was ever kind to children. I do not think he will ever forget my mother, or the day she died;" and that was all Davie ever knew of the wound upon her heart.

Imogene, though not gay, was cheerful, and resolutely went back to her books, redoubling her exertions to keep pace with the new plans daily perfecting in her mind. The old motive had ignominiously perished, but that only made its successor the more imperative, and forced her benumbed energy into renewed courage, to keep on, for pride and duty's sake, in the way love had first directed.

Nothing was seen of Philip for two days, when he called, and sent his card to Miss Lee and Miss Vale, respectively. Imogene positively declined to see him, and Davie was compelled, much against her will, to do the honors alone. She was no little prejudiced against him since his last visit, and had privately rehearsed several very coldly polite speeches and attitudes for his sole edification, and which she now meant to bring forth with most withering effect; but the beauty and efficacy of this neatly arranged plan was entirely spoiled, greatly to Davie's surprise and embarrassment, by finding Philip exceedingly affable, and quite his old, unostentatious self again.

After the first slightly confused greeting was over, he took a seat on the sofa beside her, remarking pointedly, as if he would have her accept it as an apology for his former

stately behavior on a similar occasion, "I had a long, rough journey of it, and was not sorry to see the Alden hills. I have not been very well lately, and the two have made a perfect bear of me."

Indeed, he did look wretched, and Davie's pitying eye sought his face commiseratingly, as if it might tell her something of his malady. Philip, on the contrary, was prospecting on anything but his personal ailments, shrewdly contriving, through the simple medium of her innocence, how he might ascertain all she knew of Imogene, correctly guessing that anything unwonted in her demeanor would leak out in Davie's artless conversation, if adroitly led by so sharp a questioner as himself.

"Is Miss Vale sick, that she denies her presence?"

Davie, guileless child, blushed scarlet. She could not tell a direct lie, and the searching look of those deep-set, penetrating eyes must be answered unequivocally.

"Genie is quite well, but—you must excuse me—I fear you frightened her by the—the rigid formality of your first visit. I don't mind; but she does not get over such things easy."

"I confess myself a brute that day, and beg your pardon, and hers also. Genie is a proud creature, and for her displeasure I may not find so ready a forgiveness as I have in your case. Does she go much into society?"

"No, indeed. There she puzzles and often pains me. Do you know that for the past two years nothing can induce her to dance. A nun could not be more circumscribed, and I doubt not she will be telling her beads some day; although she voluntarily told me this morning that she meant to be very gay this winter, and renounce forever the old recluse habits; so I have some hopes of her yet," said Davie, delighted at the bare thought of Imogene's promised gayety; but if she had seen the sudden spasm that contracted Philip's face she would have divined, perhaps, that he was not

so very much pleased with Miss Vale's new determination as the revelation merited. He struggled to repress the darkling shadow on his brow, and with subtle suavity continued his interrogations.

"They tell me in the village, where she is not much of a favorite, that she is a famous musician, unequalled in power and brilliancy?"

The question instantly aroused Davie's enthusiasm to the highest pitch of feminine praise, and, as regarded her on this occasion, inadvertent confidence.

"Yes, but no one knows it as well as I do. She plays the organ and sings in church, and that is all the village knows of her rare genius, for it is rare and wonderful, Philip; and though it touches me beyond all other music, I can in nowise comprehend or describe from whence comes the sweet charm of Genie's marvellous playing. You should have seen her last night. I am used to her erratic flights, but she amazed even me. Sometimes she improvises grandly; but only in certain moods, when the spell is on, as she calls it. She went out walking two evenings ago—maybe I ought not to speak of it, but you are such an old friend I am sure you will not mention it. She only asked me not to tell mother," hesitated Davie, not quite certain of the propriety of further enlightening Philip on the matter of Imogene's peculiarities in the present state of their alienation.

"You may rely on my entire silence; I am not a babbler, and anything pertaining to Imogene is of the greatest interest to me," gravely assured Philip, and so earnestly that Davie again became communicative.

"Well, as I told you, she went out walking, and the moment she came in, she threw off her wrappings and flew to the piano. I can't begin to tell you, but it was the most madly impassioned thing in the way of music that ever intoxicated and bewildered mortal ears, and she looked the

very embodiment of her inspiration. Genie said it was the Song of the Nameless, and that she could not sing it again for her life."

Philip abruptly walked to the window, and back, drawing the cloak that he wore loosely about his shoulders more tightly about his throat, to hide the something that seemed to stick there to the detriment of readily replying.

"The Song of the Nameless," he repeated, slowly. "I can well conceive the soul she put into the theme after — after —" Philip, not accrediting to Davie much keenness of perception, did not take the trouble to finish his remark, indicating by another shrug and nervous pull at his cloak that he would rather listen than talk.

"Of a truth, Philip, she did put soul, and heart, and passion into it, and, singular as you may think it, right in the midst of it she fainted dead away. A face of wax dropped down to the yet sounding keys, and lay there cold as a stone, and so beautiful, Philip, that I stopped to admire and kiss it before trying to bring back its truant color."

Captain Shirley's moustached lip trembled, for he had seen that matchless face white and stone-like, with blood-dabbled lips, and waves of black hair rippling in tangled beauty from a brow to which *his* hand had given the impress of sudden death.

"And the rest; what did you do?" Davie did not notice the quavering of his voice, nor the noiseless way his strong teeth came together and settled in his lip.

"Oh, I just sprinkled her plentifully with snow, and she was herself in a minute. She was not sick. It was only the heat of the room after her quick walk in the cold. She said so; and complimented my sense in bringing her to as I did, without flying for help, as most simpletons would have done."

"You are the same dear, bright sunbeam, I see, Davie;

and as I look at you now, single-minded and blithe-hearted, I forget you are a young lady, and think of you as a little sunny-tempered girl playing by the roadside, without a trouble in life, save your conflict with fractions, and failure to master the three ground rules; and I would have you consider me as graceless Phil, in ragged jacket and torn hat. Will you, Davie?"

She was pleased at his touching allusion to the old-time reminiscences, and her happy face spoke how glad she would be to return to their childhood's frank familiarity. To Philip her nature was as transparent as a limpid pool that no storm had ever reached, and into which no murky waters had ever flowed, and well aware that in truthful simplicity she would carefully repeat every word he said to Imogene. Therefore it stood him in hand to weigh well every word he uttered, that the more sagacious Genie might read their double meaning, and, in their sincere childish telling by Davie, be merciful to him. He could not believe that she would persist in their estrangement, and hoped much from Vida's tender interest in his behalf.

Resuming his seat beside the unsuspecting girl, he fixed his eyes, eloquent with that gentle expression, the memory of which was so dear to lame Olive, and now sent a warmer rose to Davie's cheek, upon the smiling face half avoiding, half meeting his, and said, with a persuasive fervor that only Philip Shirley was capable of:

"If Imogene is obdurate, you will not cease to be my friend. I need a kind, gentle, sister friend, one who will be lenient with my faults and bear with my impatience. I have a dreadful temper; you know it, Davie, and it gets the better of me sometimes, and, as I am a living man, I wish I had died before it led me into doing that for which I can never sufficiently atone."

"I am not a clever woman," said Davie; "and I am young to presume upon counselling a man brave and

aspiring like you, who has the world for a teacher and experience for a guide. I am not so competent of understanding and sympathizing with your nature as Imogene. She seems fitted to naturally affiliate with a temperament peculiarly constituted like yours, Philip, and I should feel as if I had robbed her by assuming that which has always impressed me as being her special and absolute prerogative: the balancing of Philip Shirley's peccable as well as noble, and, in many respects, inimitable and grandly heroic character. I never wilfully committed a sin in my life, and to the casting out of Genie I could not be the friend you would wish me. You two are riddles to me. Imogene frequently hurts and alarms me by praying me to love her, when she must know that I do, all the sister I have; and she so exquisitely beautiful that sometimes, when looking at her, I feel like falling on my knees that God has made anything so perfectly lovely. And she used to be so fond of you. It was her old saying, 'I am fond of Philip,' when she was little, and the girls tried to tease her about you. And then for her to go on so about being wicked. I declare it makes me sick to think of it."

It was as much as Davie could do to keep back the tears. Philip caught the hand that was making a furtive attempt to brush her left eye, and gave it what might be termed a jerk, if Davie had been a boy.

"Wicked! What did she mean by being wicked?"

"I am sure I don't know; but she maintained that black-haired people were all devils, and that she was one. I never was so shocked and sorry." Davie's eyes filled at the recollection, and Philip resumed his walk to and from the window so hastily that the jealously retained cloak slipped from his shoulder, and showed his right hand in a sling. The discovery dried Davie's tears, and awakened her ready pity and curiosity.

"Why, Philip, when did you injure your hand?"

"Oh, it is nothing—an intentional accident." He laughed ironically.

"I noticed you were chary of your right hand, but I did not impute it to a serious cause; and not to mention it. Is this the sisterly confidence you would give me?"

"It is a miserable trifle," and in your better conversation I forgot the slight annoyance of a self-crippled arm. I am off to the frontier next week, and may never visit this place again. Crave my pardon of Miss Vale, and say I wounded my right hand in retaliation for its most cowardly crime, and that its blood stained the snow where more precious blood was spilled. Don't look so horrified; in plain language, I hurt it against the hickory-tree."

Davie recovered her equanimity at the last comprehensible solution of his hurt, and fell back to her tenderly solicitous manner. "Take good care, Philip, and let no more 'intentional accidents' befall you, and come to see us often in the short week you have among those who have ever been kindliest friends."

"Will Miss Lee be glad to see me as frequently as I may be tempted to avail myself of her invitation?"

"Davie will—always glad, Philip."

Her little hand settled argumentatively on the disabled arm, almost frightened, yet quite content in the liberty it was taking. Philip looked at it, but did not touch it, for he was thinking how another hand as white, and weak, and small, had slid from his sleeve in a tremor of anguish, and he could not caress this one, with the other a conscience on his heart. Davie was a stranger to everything like coquetry, and did not for a moment anticipate receiving in return a loving pressure; but her own little heart caught the infection, and she began to think that there must be something very electrical in a young officer's cloak. It was not disagreeable, however, only new and novel, and she liked Philip very, very much. Her pruriency to retail the

extent of his injuries, and the change for the better in his manner, was so great that she could not afford to watch Philip's departure farther than the doorstep, and before he had reached the gate she was in the placid presence of the, at the moment, exceedingly studious Imogene. Davie threw herself into the nearest chair, and proceeded to open her budget, not the less spicy from her listener's apparent apathy.

"Well, if I have not been surprised! To think of his grandeur the other day, and now as meek as Moses — just our plain, old Phil; and I to practise my stateliest for nothing. That's what comes of forming your line of battle before you know the position of the enemy. He looks wretched, and says he has not been very well lately."

"Not well?" Imogene was evincing more interest than she thought.

"No; and pale as a ghost. At first he would do nothing but get up and sit down in a regular fidget, and kept his cloak about his ears like a man ready to start in a second. He spoke of you, and was so sorry that he gave offence the other day that I forgave him without his asking; and it is really too bad of you to hold a grudge, and be earnest in not seeing him. I would not lay it up, Genie, but do as I have done — take him back to former favor," urged Davie, slyly watching the effect of her appeal.

"I am not so forgiving, and abandon him henceforth to your kinder care. He chose to be unwarrantably arrogant with me, and I choose to continue so; and let me here implicitly affirm that I am never at home to Captain Shirley."

"Now you *are* cruel, Genie, and carrying it too far," protested Davie.

"Perhaps I am; but, nevertheless, I have said it, and I will most sacredly keep my word."

"You are too unbending; when he could bow his pride and feelingly confess his fault."

"That you might repeat his excessive humility and penitence to me. Philip Shirley is a consummate actor, and you are not discerning, Davie," contemptuously returned Imogene, reading the young captain's purpose in vesting Vida with his deep contrition.

"No, nor designing either," retorted Davie, tartly; "and I will not see designs and deceit in others. I would be ashamed of such baseness toward any one, especially Philip, who comes with a sad face and wounded hand to prove his sincerity and the right to claim my sympathy." This was the reserve shot that she had withheld in case Genie's anger remained unappeased, and anxiously waited its effect. But she was doomed to disappointment. Imogene's features were immovable.

"A wounded hand is to be deplored. How came Philip to be so unfortunate?"

"He hurt it two nights ago in some strange way connected with the old hickory. It was a foggy explanation, make the best of it. His arm was in a sling, and several times he appeared to be suffering a sudden twinge, and he looked haggard, interestingly pallid, and nervous," conclusively summed up the compassionate Davie.

"I dare say a military cloak and a hand in a sling are becoming, particularly to a young officer. Vastly engaging and pity-inspiring to a susceptible mind," she sneered, derisively. "Pray, is his warrior arm considered to be dangerously mutilated?"

"Don't be so hard, Genie. Do you two hate or love each other, that your dispositions are so materially changed? He gnawing his lip and laughing at nothing, as if it were a nice thing to get a painful hurt, and you making enigmatical fun of it, as if it were a subject of satirical ridicule." Davie gave a thoughtful tap on the carpet with

the tip of her trim slipper, and, with proper stress on the obscure parts, gave a full and authentic account of her conversation with Philip. At the conclusion, Imogene merely passed her hand over her mouth and made a motion to resume her book. Davie was in despair. "He is going away next week, and may never return."

"It is his duty to go, and his going or remaining does not enhance or decrease our happiness," calmly replied the impenetrable Imogene.

"You are too bitter. I could not be so relentless toward Phil, and you will regret it when too late. Mark my words, Genie; you will repent when repentance is vain," solemnly admonished Davie, sighing prophetically.

Genie met the sigh sternly.

"Now, Davie, let me tell you, once for all, that it is useless for you to attempt convincing *me* of Philip Shirley's ephemeral virtues. *I know him!* I am done raving, and will be no sycophant to a pair of glittering epaulets, though they do grace the shoulders of this incomparable captain. I am tired of these ceaseless panegyrics regarding one I despise, and his pathetic wounds and melancholy excite in me nought but contempt. I understand his motive for winning your sisterly sympathy; and while I know you are blameless, I accredit to him no more nor less than he deserves. Now you have my mind, plain as words can express it, and let this end the matter for the future. Judging as I do clearly, it is disagreeable and repulsive to me, and I beg you never to recur to the distasteful theme again."

Davie was utterly abashed and confounded, and, not presuming on further pacificatory advice, silently left Imogene to her book, mystified at the way in which some people misconstrue innocent intentions.

After a great deal of pondering, Davie arrived at the conclusion that she was just a little glad that Genie had taken such an unaccountable antipathy to Philip, and, so

far as she could see, that the aversion was mutual, for she was liking and thinking of him more and more. His voice and his step were writing out the old story that Imogene and Olive had already learned and wept for. To unsophisticated little Davie it was a strange, sweet problem, that her heart began to solve and translate into language that is purely beautiful but once in the longest lifetime. And the watching and the waiting and the flutter of delight — the glad tumult of love's half understood dream — Imogene beheld in anxiety so intense that it amounted almost to terror. Yet she dare not caution, lest the very warning should bring the shadow closer. "She will show me her heart when fully realizing where it has gone," reasoned the astute girl, and Davie verified the prediction with a little judicious aid. She was frequently attacked with sudden fits of pensiveness, and, if Phil did not come during the day, was sure to be restless the entire evening; and when this was more palpable than usual, Genie gave her a scrutinizing look, and asked, pointedly:

"Are you happy, Davie?"

"Happy! of course I am."

"Let me put it in a different form. Is there anything in your thoughts that you would fear the dearest to know?"

"Yes, one thing; not fear — that is not the word — but a hesitation of telling about a — a matter that don't exactly concern any one but myself. It is a queer muddle I 'm in, anyhow, and I hardly know how to explain it," stammered Davie, blushing and twisting in a vain attempt to get at the cause of the vexing muddle.

"Suppose I guess?" encouraged Genie.

"I wish you would, for I want you to know. The truth of it is, Genie, I am afraid I love, or am going to love Philip Shirley, truly, deeply, and with all my heart and soul."

"Oh, God!"

The exclamation escaped her before she could check the quick pang the confession caused; and, covering her face, Imogene swayed to and fro, oblivious of the surprised blue eyes regarding her in wondering suspense. This exhibition of emotion was unlike Imogene, and Davie could give it but one interpretation.

"Do *you* love him, Genie?"

"I? no!" The proud, white face lifted haughtily. "It is for you alone I am troubled. I would not think of him, Davie. A poor captain, with nothing in the world but a yet untried sword."

"Phil is poor, but I don't care for that. I'll give him all I've got; I suppose I am an heiress in a small way; and — and — well, I don't mind for his being poor."

"He will always be away. You could not endure the rough hardships of a soldier's wife."

"But I could stay here with mother, and love him just the same. There is a deal of comfort in writing, and that no distance could debar me from enjoying."

Imogene blanched to the temples, pity swallowed up every other emotion; and, clasping Davie's listless hand, she implored her to forget the man to whom her simple love was not, could not be, anything.

"Put him out of your thoughts, Davie. Philip does not care for you as you do for him. He is morbid, despotical, and a fiend in temper. He would break your gentle heart in a year, and laugh at the ruin. Keep it away from his merciless path, for he nurses a foul demon of ambition in his conscienceless bosom, and you will be but another sacrifice to its rapacity. To men of his nature a wife soon becomes a wearying incumbrance — a life-long annoyance — a perpetual regret. His heart was never intended to shelter a dove; savage and tyrannical, it has found its avocation in his bloody profession; and a woman's affection, tender and meek, like yours, has no part in it."

"You make Phil out a terrible fellow, Genie; but *I* would not be afraid to trust my life to him," said Davie, incredulously.

"He is a penniless subordinate; the sport of fortune, wandering from border post to frontier town, and no right to steal into your heart — a mean, unworthy object. You are not nameless, but he cannot — oh, what am I saying, what sophistry am I uttering? Oh, Davie, if you love me, let Philip Shirley go," she cried, in frantic entreaty, clasping her dress in a wild appeal of earnestness.

"I love you best when it comes to that; and if you feel so badly about my caring for Philip, I 'll abjure him from this moment, and be guided by you. You are wise in such matters, and as good at advice as mamma, to whom I should have carried my heart as soon as I fairly understood its inclination and import toward Philip."

Imogene lowered her eyes, conscious that Ruth had not been consulted in the long reign this Philip had exercised over her, and, touched at the implicit faith the child-woman reposed in her, she kissed and cried over Davie in a manner that was exceedingly startling and incomprehensible for Imogene Vale to indulge in and her companion to witness.

"I am sure I don't understand the cause of your agitation, Genie; but I would not have you think that I do not like Philip, for I do, and his mere step sets me all a-tingle; still I am not going to tear my hair or fall into hysterics on his account. And in justice to him, I must say that he never spoke a word of love, or intimated by look or tone that I was anything more to him than the rest of the world. The folly was of my own creating, and nobody to blame but silly me."

Davie made an heroic attempt to appear unconcerned, and even forced a smile, but it was a woful failure.

"He is only selfishly thoughtless, and will desist when

aware of the mischief that may accrue," mused Genie; and Captain Shirley was amazed by receiving a little twisted billet, bearing neither date nor signature, that said: "Spare Davie; you are not blind, and *her* happiness is too precious for your destroying."

Young Shirley was greatly startled at the plainly implied danger, and promptly determined to obviate any undue preference Davie might cherish toward him other than the simple child-affection she had always given him. Straightway he repaired to Mr. Lee's, and met Davie's warm welcome with his usual familiarity. Taking her hand, and looking kindly in her sweet, upturned face, he said:

"I am going away to-morrow, Davie."

"To-morrow!" The smile faded, and the dove-eyes went to the carpet. Imogene was right; Vida loved him, and Philip hated himself that it was so.

"I love you like a sister, and when I am gone you must write to me. Letters are choice blessings in that far region, and I would like to hear from this old place through the bright instrumentality of your pen. Will you promise?"

"Of course I will. If to write will please you, why, *I* shall be doubly pleased."

"Mrs. Lee will not object?" This was a cautious hint that nothing must be kept from her mother; but she did not need it.

"Oh, no," innocently replied Davie; "mamma will not object. She is more likely to help me out with it should I run short of ideas; and, perhaps, I may persuade Genie to add a line."

"I am still out of favor with Gypsy. I wish I knew how to expiate in a way that would be acceptable to her," sighed Philip.

Davie shook her head in perplexity.

"Genie has taken a great dislike to a military calling,

and I presume shuns you for that reason more than any other. She vows you are inordinately ambitious, and will never care for anything but your profession, and value nothing but power; that in the absorbing strife for promotion you will forget the nobler aims of life. Can't you convince me, Philip, that she is mistaken?" The humid blue eyes sought his for a refutation of Imogene's severe but well-grounded opinions.

"I have my aspirations, Davie, but I hope not quite so soul-destroying as Gypsy would depict them. I am a marvel to myself, and don't know of what I am capable. Circumstances make or mar me in a moment. I can't begin to fathom my own character, or how future events may mould it. I love power; I like to rule, and stand above the heads of other men. But never mind, I can't change my nature; and as this is my last call, I must say good-by to Mrs. Lee."

Ruth appeared in answer to Davie's summons, and bestowed on the short captain a motherly hand-shake.

"Davie has promised to write to me, Mrs. Lee. I am off to-morrow, and if David will not shoot me for the liberty, I'll include a kiss in my farewell, for it will be many a long day before I have the privilege again."

Ruth sanctioned the liberty. "Good-by, and God bless and protect you, Philip;" and the little brown-haired woman hastened away to conceal the tears crowding unbidden to the soft brown eyes.

Philip set his regulation cap in a peculiarly slow way on his close-cropped head, suggestive of having something very important yet to say. Presently he looked up in the quick, smiling way common to his young days.

"Here is a kiss for Gypsy; my old love Gypsy; my star-eyed Gypsy; and this for you. Say I gave hers first, that she might not feel slighted, and pray her to remember it to the forgetting of a blow."

He took Davie's astonished face between his hands, deliberately kissed her twice, and, before she could reply, his firm steps were sounding beyond the maples.

It is superfluous to say that Davie promptly delivered the message. Running straight to Genie, she unceremoniously bestowed a rousing smack in much the same fashion as she fondly fancied Philip had recently honored her.

"That is from Captain Shirley, and he has gone. I could cry, if it would help the matter; and you won't even allow me the poor consolation of talking about him," ruefully bemoaned Vida.

"Yes, you may," graciously returned Genie. "Let me hear all he said."

"Now, Imogene, if you ain't aggravating with your whims. Here only the other day you went on awful just because I mentioned his name, and here you are luring me into a repetition of that flagrant offence."

"I have changed my mind since then, and am in a mood to hear all you may desire to relate of his final adieus."

"Well, to begin with, he has the roughest moustache that ever martyred a feminine cheek," said Davie, rubbing her own significantly.

"Don't be childish," curtly remonstrated Genie, not relishing Miss Lee's flippancy.

"Beg pardon. He said, 'Tell Gypsy, my old love Gypsy'—accent on my—'and pray her to remember it to the forgetting of a blow'—emphasis on forgetting—and, as I am not an Œdipus, you must solve the riddle yourself. He made me promise to write to him; and won't I fill eight pages the very first letter! Phil gone—I can scarcely believe it! The first and last military beau, doubtless, we shall ever have, and I did not love him, that is, irredeemably, after all. Thaddeus is my pet brother yet. Dear old Thad! I wonder what he would say if he knew that 'the

captain with his whiskers took a sly glance at me.' All on my part, you know."

Davie skipped from the room gay as a song-bird, and Imogene felt perfectly easy regarding the impression Philip's ambiguous attentions had left on her heart, and that that delicate organ in the vivacious Miss Lee was not seriously injured by its brief tilt with Cupid.

CHAPTER XXIX.

DAVIE EXPATIATES ON SEVERAL TOPICS, AND LOT COLBURN RECEIVES A VISITOR.

SPRING came at last. May plenteously threw her roses into the lap of June, and ushered in the full summer without materially changing the outer aspect of Imogene's existence. Shunning young people of her own age, as she did, she knew very little of what was going on in the village, and cared less. Davie was her sole gossip, and nothing pleased that lively young lady so much as to arouse her curiosity to the degree of asking a question.

It was a delicious June afternoon when, returning from the village, Davie dropped into the most comfortable easy-chair, and settled herself for a cosey chat.

"First of all," she said, drawing a letter from her pocket, "here is news from Phil. Shall I read it, Genie?"

"If you please."

Whereupon Davie slowly unfolded and smoothed out the letter, as if the delay enhanced its value, and gravely read aloud its brief contents:

"FORT SMITH, NEVADA, *March* 15.

"DEAR SISTER DAVIE: How are all the old-home folks, and how are the days passing with you? Happy, I judge,

by your last sunbeam of a letter. The leaves will be out on the hickory and the grass green in the lane by the time this reaches you. How ardently we used to watch for its springing up along the fences, and the warmer sheltered nooks — you, and I, and Gypsy."

Here Davie paused to wipe her eyes and glance at Genie, to see if she was paying proper attention. Imogene's rapt attitude satisfied her, and she went on:

"We were camping out last week, and I lay down in the tall grass — a wilderness of treeless verdure, a million stars overhead — and thought of you all at home. Loved faces trooped by in my dreams — yours bright and fair, without a shadow, and Gypsy's just as I saw it last — *as I saw it last.* The sad regrets since, you can never guess; and, but for your constant friendship, life would be almost desolate. But I will not be gloomy, and beg you ever to think kindly of PHIL."

"A good, brotherly letter; don't you think so, Genie?" said Davie, refolding it with nice exactness.

"Yes, and I am much obliged for his polite remembrance of myself; and when you write again, say, from me, that I shall ever recollect *him* as *I* saw him last," coldly rejoined Imogene.

"I came near loving him once," laughed Davie, "and the alarming fact came near scaring you out of your wits, and turned your remarkable placidity upside-down. Phil took such extraordinary pains to call me his sister, that I mistrust he did not care for a dearer affection. Sister, forsooth! That expression completely capsized my love, and the frail bark has never righted since."

"And well for you it did not, for in righting you would have found it more wrong," replied Genie, the meaning of which was hopelessly obscure to Davie, who lazily exclaimed, "Heigho! let us get up some sort of a sensation, everything is so stupid. No Thaddeus, no Philip, no Nestor, no Mars,

to enliven our dull sphere. Lawyer and warrior have both deserted us, and left us to pine alone! By the way, do you know the Colburns are going to Europe next week?"

Imogene started. "Mr. Colburn going abroad! are you sure?"

"Yes; poor Olive! her health is miserable, and Dr. Humphrey says nothing but a change will save her, and consequently they are off to foreign parts."

Imogene made no reply; but a great purpose was born out of the knowledge Davie had carelessly imparted, and the hope she took to her pillow that night was fate's first mysterious tracery of the way she was to go.

. . . . . .

"Is Mr. Colburn in?" Sam's aging eyes peered hard at the woman who made the inquiry before answering in the affirmative:

"Yes, Miss; shall I take your card?"

"No. Tell him a lady desires an interview." She was closely veiled, but genteelly dressed, and Sam did not think it prudent to hesitate longer than was sufficient to impress her with his own as well as his master's importance.

"When you are done staring, be so good as to state my request to Mr. Colburn." The tone was not humble, and Sam disappeared with the message.

"My master is at leisure, and will see you immediately," was his gracious information on returning, and pompously ushered her into the member's study.

Lot Colburn pointed to a chair, but the lady took no heed of the courtesy: standing by the table in the middle of the room, and directly opposite him, she quietly raised her veil.

"You do not know me, sir?" A swift glance from the steely eyes, and the member composedly replied:

"Yes, I do. You are Imogene Vale." She looked at him inquiringly. "I saw you once, ten years ago, playing

by the roadside with David Lee's daughter and a chubby, ill-favored boy." She appeared slightly embarrassed at his unlooked-for knowledge of her. Lot noted it, and said kindly: "What can I do for you? I presume your visit is of a business nature?"

"First, I must beg your pardon for my unintroduced intrusion, and" —

"Which is not necessary, I assure you. Beauty never intrudes," gallantly interrupted the member, with an admiring bow.

"Spare me your compliments; I neither seek nor value them," she said, a frown of impatience marking her momentary displeasure, which was not lost on the polite member. He bowed again, and she dashed at once into the object of her visit.

"I was born in France. A strange, adverse gale wafted me here when an infant, and here have I grown to womanhood. Circumstances, which I cannot at present explain, have made the doubt of my parentage a fact that must be revealed. You are going to Europe, and I came to implore you to take me with you in the capacity of your daughter's servant."

"Servant!" Lot Colburn was confounded.

"Yes, servant — companion, it 's all the same. I know of what you are thinking, but my pride is not of that sort. I am strong and healthy, and will serve her faithfully, nor scruple at the most menial task."

"You certainly surprise me, Miss Vale; but I am not averse to the proposition. Olive must have some lady to accompany her as a companion. I was just writing to a friend on the subject," pointing to a half-finished letter on the table, "and soliciting his aid in selecting a competent person for the place. My knowledge of the kind required is limited, and my daughter's less. I will see Mr. Lee on the matter, and —"

"Oh, no, no!" she cried, hastily. "There are reasons why Mr. Lee, why no one should know of the step I contemplate. I don't want people, I mean some people, a — a person, rather, to know why nor where I go."

The keen, sharp eyes of the member fastened on the girl's excited face suspiciously.

"When did you last see Philip Shirley?" He suspected the secret lay in that quarter — hence the abrupt question.

She met his penetrating gaze without the falling of an eyelash.

"I have not seen, spoken, or written to Captain Shirley since he left Alden twelve months ago. The veriest stranger could not be less to me."

"But you used to be fond of him. He told me so."

"Did he? How sublimely egotistical! He was always a prince of self-conceit. I may have been partial to him as a child, but age wore out the old garment, and I long since threw it unregretfully aside."

"Age!" the member looked at the young creature pityingly, and, as he had on a former occasion walked thoughtfully up and down before the queer-featured Philip, he now meditatively paced to and fro before the magnificent Imogene. By singular chance both had come to him for their peculiar destinies — the boy to scale the heights of a lofty ambition, the girl to work out the ends of a secret purpose — to checkmate the soldier, perhaps, when half-way up the hill of life. It was a serious matter. Lot Colburn was not the man to treat a serious matter lightly, and dropped the mere polite for the strictly grave and determined.

"Sit down, Miss Vale. I will do nothing in the dark. You must be frank with me."

"I will," she said, taking the chair he proffered. "It is not as you think. My sole object is to clear my mother's fame — beyond that I have no hope, no wish. Mrs. Lee is no stranger to my intentions, and would not, if she could,

hinder or coerce my actions in this direction. It is not the purpose, but with whom I go, that I desire to keep secret."

"But I cannot consent to your leaving clandestinely, and that too by my tacit sanction," replied the member, shaking his head dissentingly.

Seeing the gathering firmness of the fine-cut mouth, Imogene cried, entreatingly, "Oh, sir, I beg you to listen to me. The search may be futile, then I must return to Alden, and do you suppose that I will leave so treacherously that Ruth Lee would not welcome me back? I know her heart, and she knows my nature. Leave to *me* the satisfying of those who are dearest, and have loved me best!"

The tight-clasped hands fell pleadingly to his knee, and the beautiful eyes sought his in tearless supplication; but Lot Colburn was not to be moved; she felt it, and sprang up in proud defiance.

"You refuse — then I go alone. You might have given me the protection such as my age and sex demanded in a journey of the perilous kind; but I will not beg a right of any man. You put Philip Shirley's feet on solid ground, and thrust mine in the mire. If it engulf me, will you be held blameless, Lot Colburn?"

She rushed toward the door, her indignant eyes flashing back a look of mingled scorn and disappointment. The member stopped her by a peremptory grasp of the arm raised to open the door.

"You are as impulsive and uncontrollable as the day you dashed the squirrel against the wall. If I should consent to this hare-brained plan of yours, how could I exculpate the very extraordinary proceeding to Mr. Lee, who stands in the relation of a father to you, and has the material right to hold me accountable for my share in this, to say the least, extremely questionable business? And, aside from this unpleasant aspect of the affair, have you thought

of the grief you will bring to a happy home in suddenly quitting it, perhaps forever?"

"Thought of it? Oh, you little know what I have endured! You cannot guess what a wretched failure I have made of life, nor what I have suffered in resigning the quiet home, though it be of charity, which David Lee has ever given me."

"It is easy to see that you are not unacquainted with trouble; but apart from the matter under consideration, I have no wish to pry into your secret sorrows; and I will gladly give you the opportunity you seek of going abroad, provided you unreservedly acquaint your immediate friends with your intentions and the motive."

"That cannot be," she replied, decisively. "I have thought of it long and calmly. There is but one way to accomplish my object, and that is silence, absolute silence; there are causes that make this imperative, and a further waste of words is useless."

"But how were you to do this? How avoid the comments of the village, and at the same time keep the fact of your going under my direct care a secret?" queried the member, knitting his brows.

"I would have met Miss Colburn in New York, and thereby easily evaded all the idly curious and maliciously wondering tongues."

"Ah, that would place it in a somewhat different light. Still it looks bad," doubtingly pondered the perplexed member.

"Do not look at it, then," quietly observed Imogene. "I have asked, and you have refused. By playing the organ in church I am mistress of a little money, and the world is open to all. The only alternative left me is to go alone, and I shall do so."

"But I dare not leave you to the rash alternative," interposed the other. "You look just the woman to keep your

word; and if you did, it would not be exactly easy with my conscience. Had I met you on board the steamer which sails from New York next week, and on which I have engaged passage for three, I would have unhesitatingly granted your request." He gave her a peculiarly knowing smile that she was not slow to understand, and, overjoyed at her tacit success, gratefully kissed his hand, and without a word of thanks — her heart was too full — drew down her veil and passed from the room.

He followed her, and at the great hall-door took occasion to whisper: "I always stop at the Astor House, and the notice of the arrival of my daughter's companion will meet with prompt attention."

A murmured "Thank you" from under the veil assured him that she heard, and down the marble steps that Philip had descended in exultant glee to grapple with the bloody fame standing midway in manhood's prime went Imogene, her hopes and thoughts and prayers all beyond the sea, and the curtain drawn forever between her and the household of David Lee. And that evening she said to Davie, as they sat on the door-stone together, in the old girlish fashion: "Suppose we should never sit here again; would it make you feel very bad, Davie?"

"Now, Imogene, I protest! Why are you eternally supposing and looking at me in that way, with your great black eyes gloomy as star-shaded pools at midnight?" cried Davie, hastily; and her companion indulged in no more supposes, to the infinite relief of the merry Miss Vida.

A few evenings later, when David came in from the corn-lot, fatigued and warm by a long day's hoeing, Imogene took particular pains that his easy-chair should be in his favorite spot under the maples, and was more than ever attentive to his little wants and comforts.

"Are you tired, uncle?" she asked, anxiously, removing

the old, weather-beaten hat, and running her soft fingers through his damp hair.

"Pretty well tuckered out, bright-eyes; and what have my girls been doing all day?"

"A little of everything," chimed in Davie, pelting him with moss-roses from the bush close by, and merrily fastening a great cluster in his shirt-front, as well as a liberal bunch in his ample waistband, a ludicrous proceeding that did not bring even a smile to Imogene's grave face.

"Goodness, papa, what a bewitching Flora you are!" laughed the gay daughter, frisking around her sire in mock admiration.

"Or a queen of May," dryly suggested the good-natured father, leaning his head against Genie's caressing hands, but keeping his eyes fixed fondly on his child.

"Uncle David, I am afraid I have never been grateful enough; I mean I have not sufficiently lived out the deep gratitude I feel for your long love and care of me," she said, bending to kiss the graying locks about his temples.

David twisted his head out of her soothing clasp to look at her almost reproachfully: "How now, puss! what am I to do if my solemn-eyed daughter continues to grow so self-accusing? Tut, tut, Genie! don't pain your old father by such words. I've had my great reward in your love. I could not do without my girl, that is as dear as the one skipping out there on the grass."

David's strong, brown hand — how long she remembered the callous ridges in the hard palm — passed gently over the beautiful face, hiding its anguish on his shoulder.

"I am at my tenderest, most humble best to-night, and feel as if I would like to ask your forgiveness that I have not always expressed myself worthy of all the goodness you have bestowed on the beggar's orphaned child."

"Well, if the girl is not clean daft! There, there, Genie, I'll hear no more about beggars. I am not much

for petting you dainty bits of womankind; I'm too old and clumsy; but bless you, child, I've got a roof and love broad enough to cover their dear, pretty heads — plenty, child, plenty. It does beat all, that I, the most rough, awkward man in town, should have three of the neatest, slimmest, smartest beauties for miles around, in my house." David stretched out his feet, conscious of his precious possessions, and glancing sagely toward the cloudy west, sagaciously predicted, "To-morrow a wet day, and bad for hoeing." Ruth calling that supper was ready, brought David out of his arm-chair, and, as he was going, Imogene said, more nervously than hastily:

"Good night, uncle; I've been to tea, and shall not be down again." Mr. Lee kissed her, and saw her go up stairs, and no warning voice whispered that it was the last good-night for many, many years.

An hour after, Ruth found her sitting up stairs by the window, where her mother had watched for five seasons the coming and falling of the leaves, when this thoughtful girl was a self-willed, imperious child.

"I am glad you came, Aunt Ruth," she said, equivocally; "for I have said farewell to the landscape, and as the morning may find us changed, at least in being a night older, we will say good night, as we would good-by, and remember each other as we look at this moment."

Ruth was nonplussed for a reply, and as completely bewildered as Davie would have been under the circumstances.

"What ails you, to have such morbid notions? I wish you would be more cheerful, Genie, and less given to these singular fits of gloom," chided Ruth.

Imogene did not reply, but she put her arms about her neck in one lingering kiss that silenced speech in both, and Ruth went away impressed with the idea that it was her duty to ask of Imogene a full confidence of what was obvi-

ously preying upon her mind to the great injury of her health and spirits; and Imogene thought, "I have one pang the less to endure — the worst is over." After this she was more herself, and tranquilly sought her pillow. Davie thought her fast asleep, until she unexpectedly dispelled the belief by saying: "Put your arms around me, Davie, and say all the endearing things you can think of, for I am hungry for affection to-night." Then she was still, and Davie remembered these as Imogene's last words.

When two o'clock struck — she had heard every hour go by — Imogene arose cautiously, attired herself in the most suitable dress she had for travelling — a sombre brown, from head to foot — and cautiously stole down stairs, unbolted the kitchen-door, and was out in the damp, starless night. The clouds, lowering in the east, presaged rain, and the drear atmosphere, chill and heavy, seemed to shut her in and press upon her lungs. Her breath came short and quick, and her faltering steps could scarcely find the path. The gate-latch clicked back to its place, and Imogene was on the other side, the old house, a pile of blackness, behind her, and the road, darker still, ahead. Once outside, she gave one wild look at the home she was leaving, and rapidly began her walk to the village. Lot Colburn and his daughter had left the day before, and she was creeping away like a thief, to take the early train due at Alden at three o'clock, that most dismal of all depot periods, neither night nor morning, when the most homeless and wretched are sleeping *somewhere.* This was the only way she could baffle the neighborhood, and be in time for the sailing of the New York steamer. It was not fear of the night that made her shiver and sway along as if a deadly terror were on her track; it was the inward misery that shook her frame, and started the moisture on her forehead. The inky crown of the old rock loomed into view, with the hickory, grim and motionless, above it; the

memory of that woful scene enacted beneath its branches rose up so bitter that she shut her eyes and ran with utmost speed beyond its haunting vicinity. Ten minutes before the train was due she quietly entered the ladies' sitting-room at the Alden depot, a closely veiled and seemingly a very unimportant and commonplace traveller of the female-domestic character. The room was entirely solitary.

"A ticket to New York," she said in a hollow voice to the drowsy agent nodding in the little office.

The gentleman was too sleepy to notice the solitary passenger, and, gaping dismally, faintly thumped the dating-stamp down on the ticket as if it weighed a thousand pounds, pushed it through the window, received the money, pulled his cap over his eyes, and serenely resumed his chair and doze, presuming it to be some dissatisfied servant-girl going back to her German or Irish friends; and that is all the wise ticket-agent could tell about the strange flight of Imogene Vale.

The ghostly lamp flaring on the platform threw a long ray of wavering light across the track, and she could see from the dark corner where she stood great drops of rain sprinkling the ties and rattling on the uncovered portion of the platform. She had just escaped the storm, and accepted the fact as a good omen. The engine came screaming around the curve, adding life and light and noise to the blank solitude. The agent reluctantly revived into consciousness. The train backed, whistled, and stood still; a man in a glazed cap and a lantern, with his name on it, after the fashion of railroad conductors, helped her aboard; more whistling, backing, and noise, and the train was again in motion. Faster and faster it plunged on in the rain and gloom. Imogene had never before experienced the peculiar sensation of riding in a railway carriage, and felt as if she were rushing headlong to perdition, and that the lantern-bearing gnomes were satanic officials employed to keep the

whirling line of swaying cars in perpetual motion. The destination of the Alden train was not so appalling, although it landed her in New York, amidst a Babel of clamoring hackmen.

"Astor House," she said, selecting one of the least officious of the vociferating herd, and, a moment after, Imogene Vale was rolling along Broadway.

CHAPTER XXX.

GONE.

AS David had foretold, it was a wet morning. One of those revengeful rains that beat earth in sheets, driving fiercely against the windows, and dripping through the drenched leaves of the maples, soaking the grass-plots, and battering down the flower-beds — an uncompromising rain, that ran choking from the overflowing gutters, and peeped in under the doors, to the strong objection of Hetty.

When Davie awoke, at six, she heard it pelting the windows and frolicking on the roof — a continual patter of drops chasing each other off the eaves to lose themselves in the general deluge. She lifted her head, rubbed her eyes — not yet more than half awake — and reached over to ascertain if Genie was asleep, or in her quiet way listening to the rain. But Imogene was not there. "Now, what on earth could have induced her to get up so early this wretched morning? Prowling in the east bedroom, I dare say," thought Davie, sleepily turning over to renew her nap.

"Where is Genie?" asked Davie of her mother, on coming down to breakfast and finding her still absent.

"I am sure I do not know," returned Ruth; "I have not seen her this morning."

"That is queer," said Davie, thoughtfully, adding another lump of sugar to her coffee. "It is so rainy she can't be out of doors, and she has been up since six o'clock."

"What!" said Ruth, turning so sharply that Davie nearly let fall her cup.

"I don't see the need of scaring one to death. If Genie does not happen to be up stairs," said Davie, in an injured tone, "I don't know where she is. Taking a morning walk and shower-bath together, I guess; she can't do one without the other in this pour."

A horrible fear awoke in Ruth's heart; and, closely followed by her wondering daughter, she flew up stairs, murmuring audibly: "Oh, she could not, *she could not* leave me so."

But there on the bureau lay, address downward, what she was anxiously looking for, yet dreaded to find, an unsealed note, bearing the simple words, "For Aunt Ruth," in Imogene's graceful chirography.

"I knew it! I knew it!" cried Ruth, sinking, pale and shuddering, into the nearest chair. Davie picked it up in amazement, that gradually, as the alarming truth became clear, merged into deepest sorrow.

"You read it, mamma; I have not the courage," she said, in a frightened whisper, laying it back on the bureau.

"The reality cannot be worse than this terrible doubt." Ruth's shaking hand closed over the letter; and Davie, in horrified grief, listened to its contents in uninterrupted silence to the end. It was short, breathing the spirit of the unhappy writer in every line:

"UNCLE DAVID, DEAR, DEAR AUNT RUTH, AND LOVING LITTLE DAVIE: When you read this, think of me at my very best, and forgive me. It is my mangled, restless heart—poor, treacherous, deceitful heart—you are read-

ing; and, if you can, pass judgment on its many faults lightly. Every one but you will say I am ungrateful, and have basely stung the hand that fed me. But it is not true. Oh, Ruth, never believe it true, for I could kiss the very dust that your footstep had known. There is a hateful error of the past that forces me to leave you in this mean, secret manner; but in spite of it all, dear Ruth, you will not lose faith in me. Keep trusting, and say she did it for the sake of her slandered mother's memory. That is the object — Elinor Vale's fair fame; and on whom but her child should the sacred task devolve? I am going to Europe as a companion to an invalid lady, who is able to give me all I need: protection, and the semblance of a home. You will hear from me there. For the sake of the grave in Alden's church-yard, I would not have my sudden departure bruited about the village. Silence babbling tongues as far as possible, Aunt Ruth, for my mother is there, and I would spare her dust further contumely. I'll trust the love of my second mother in this dark hour of just suspicion. My heart is kissing you all good-by; and I know that to you, dear Uncle David, and sweet Davie, I shall always be IMOGENE."

The letter fell from poor Ruth's trembling grasp, and Davie's face grew white, staring at it in speechless grief.

"I might have known where all her gloomy moods and sudden fits of affection were tending," sobbed Mrs. Lee. "Call your father, Davie; he must know of this. Why, Davie, dear child, you are whiter than death. Daughter! daughter! be brave; for mother is wounded too."

The works fell on dumb ears. Davie had quietly fainted; and in restoring her to consciousness, Ruth forgot for the moment the calamity Imogene had brought upon her and the great injustice done her long care and impartial love. The girl she had looked upon as her child had, by this wilful act, adjudged her unworthy of confidence, and not to be consulted in her future movements. If it was to unravel the tangle surrounding her birth, surely Ruth had a right to know it; but Imogene had considered otherwise,

and Ruth was hurt into a moment of sorrowful indignation, that did not decrease when she saw Davie senseless under the shock that one cherished like a sister had dealt to her tender heart.

Davie recovered her senses and her voice at the same time. "It can't be, mamma. Genie would not leave us so. She is too good and high-minded."

Ruth shook her head sadly. "She is gone; went like a guilty thing in the night. Your sleeping face was not powerful to restrain her — our love too weak to stay her will."

Davie's tears began to fall fast and heavy, tumbling over her cheeks until the dimples were wet and all the smiles drowned out; but Imogene had seen her cry quite as profusely for a dead bird.

David answered Hetty's loud call. That industrious creature, having by this time mastered the situation of affairs and passed judgment on what she thought of Imogene, had betook herself to the dairy and there relieved her soul by sundry uncomplimentary mutterings that "the beggar ingratitude was sure to come out, and that she 'd not house folks till she knew 'em, and that she had all along suspected her sly and deceitful, and she never knew good to come of a face like *her'n*" — which, as it was only addressed to the pails and pans, did no especial harm, and Hetty would not for the world have thus addressed a less discreet audience.

On account of David's hasty run from the barn to the house he was exceedingly damp about the shoulders, and the brim of his straw hat more curled than common, and the moisture of his heavy boots left little puddles under his chair that, in the present state of family distress, was unheeded by the tidy Ruth. The farmer's countenance perceptibly changed color on reading the letter, and looked blankly from wife to child, as if they might possibly make more out of it than he could.

"Well, wife!" — his voice trembled, and the large hand, passing absently over his shaggy head, shook visibly, the honest face wearing a wofully hurt expression — "Well, wife, it's a sad business; and how are we to reconcile it with the memory of the dead mother as you gave your solemn word to?"

"She was always beyond me, David; but I don't think in my place Elinor would have been able to stay the tide. Her mind shrivelled to the one purpose of clearing up the doubt shadowing her mother's name; and, when she came to me praying me to tell her all I could of her past history, I was powerless, for I knew nothing that would throw a light on the question. On the contrary, the little I had to tell bore the other way, and, if anything, enhanced the mystery; and I have no doubt it so impressed Imogene, for she has never been happy since. But, before my God and conscience, I did the best I knew how for the child, David — the best in everything."

"So you did, Ruthie — so you did; but the girl has a hold on my heart, and if Davie had run away it would hardly have cut me more."

Davie pressed against his shoulder, mutely implying that *she* would never be so wicked. "Maybe it will all come out right in the end. Genie is smart, and knows pretty well how to take care of herself."

"Yes," said Ruth, slowly rolling and unrolling her apron-string, and pinching it into little crimps betweenwhiles. "Yes, she is smart, but she is so remarkably beautiful that — that I shrink from the thought of having it exposed."

"Never fear that Genie will come to grief through her beauty," spoke up Davie, briskly; "she hoards it like a miser, prizing it like something the dead have left us."

"This accounts for her strange conduct last night," said

Ruth, forgetting her recent indignant accusation of Imogene's lack of duty and want of confidence toward herself, in recalling the clinging clasp of her arms, and the way the dark eyes had looked in their last sad farewell.

"She begged me to put my arms about her," tearfully interposed Davie, "and I did, and—and she crept out of them unbeknown to me, and ran away—away from us all, in the dreary, lonesome night. Oh! I could never, never do that." She commenced crying afresh, vigorously wiping her eyes and nose with a handkerchief that was already saturated by its task of constantly drying up the copious tears.

"Hush it up in the village, as the girl hints. I hate to furnish food for a parcel of chattering gossips to feast on. And now, wife, don't cry; we will swallow the bitter pill, and say it came from the Lord," said David; and not stopping to see if his advice was followed, he went back to the barn, with as heavy a heart as when the babies were severally laid in their little graves on the hillside.

Not liking to meet any of his hands just then, he sat down on a plough under the shed, and for two hours stared at an ox-yoke hanging opposite, and chewed an oat-straw in a resolute attempt to believe that the greatest trouble of his life was from the Lord. He had shouldered it off in that quarter to console his wife; but the honest farmer had his doubts, and was fain to think that some perplexing earthly cause was at the bottom of it.

As for Ruth, she bent her meek head, gave the wanderer into God's keeping, and had one sad memory the more. Everybody went about much as they did the time Elinor died, and the rain sobbed mournfully, as if nature would add her tears in requiem of the lost.

Davie went up stairs with eyes red and swollen, and cheeks purple from crying, excitement, and sorrow. It took her several minutes to muster sufficient courage to peep into

the room where Imogene's face would never again lift to greet her entrance.

She opened the closed door; there were her dresses — the ruby merino, with black trimming, that she had looked so lovely in. The sight of it reopened the fountain, and Davie's tears again began to drop about here and there as she lifted one familiar article and folded another, not at all particular where they fell; and then the bureau that they had shared in common — the three upper drawers were Genie's, the three lower Davie's. She opened the top one reverently — it was the most sacred of Imogene's three. It was neatly arranged, just as her hand had left it. Nothing was gone but the mother-of-pearl box, the possession and contents of which had long grievously perplexed Davie's keen curiosity, but which Imogene had never deigned to gratify, and the square of bright worsted-work that Davie had finished the day Imogene met Philip under the hickory.

It was like opening a grave; and Davie looked into the drawer as sorrowfully as if Imogene lay within, mute of voice and still of feet. A spattering tear tumbled among the nice things; another and another followed in quick succession. They blinded the blue eyes, and she could not see nor speak from the crying and the choking. Her head ached miserably, too, and her temples throbbed, and her face was hot and smarting from the briny flow that had incessantly drenched it since morning; and suffering under these accumulated ills, she threw herself on the bed, lulled by the storm, and soon fell asleep. That was Davie's refuge from grief, and it was the most accommodating solace in the world, for she had the happy gift of wooing it at all times.

When she awoke it was late in the afternoon. She was somewhat confused, and at a loss to tell where she left off, or to know what to do next. She thought of crying at first, but her eyelids were so sore, and it would do no good. A

bright idea struck her, and she rallied instantly to a more hopeful view of the case, at least to the assuaging of her personal woes. She would write to Philip, and immediately sat down at her desk. It was a theme for the prescribed eight pages worthy of her prowess, and she sat about it with a will, interlining it and crosslining it with the melancholy facts of Imogene's flight, plentifully embellished by her own private distress, and a promiscuous sprinkling of the general family trouble and sorrow at her strange going away. Although written in so innocent a spirit, and in a girlish, desultory way, it was a letter that struck the worth of living out of Philip Shirley's ambitious soul.

In a week Davie was almost as gay as ever, and had naively told Susie Johnson that it was lonesome to have Genie away, but that her heart had been set on going a long time, and she ought not to complain, as mamma was satisfied that it was for the best. The little hypocrite was shrewd enough to assume that Imogene's going was no secret to the family, although so profound a one to the village. Susie intimated that she would like to know where, when, how, and with whom she went, and Davie replied to Europe, with influential friends, and her business was private, connected with her mother's family affairs. Imogene had always shut everybody from her confidence, until the habit had become proverbial, and "as glum and reticent as Imogene Vale," in Alden's estimation, was supposed to infer the acme of reserve and unsociableness. David was not quite himself for a month, showing that he did not swallow the "bitter pill" so readily after all, and Ruth's soft brown eyes never fully regained their old happy look of content.

CHAPTER XXXI.

IN CAMP.

"WELL, captain, there is no order to march yet," said Lieutenant Murray, unceremoniously entering Captain Shirley's tent, and tossing his cap and riding-gloves on the narrow apology of a bed. A tall, muscular fellow was light-hearted Walter Murray, as social and good-natured as the captain was taciturn and hot-tempered. The young officer addressed sat moodily before a rude table littered with books and papers, deep in what did not seem to be pleasant thoughts, for there was a forbidding wrinkle between his restless black eyes, and hard, fixed lines about the strong mouth that was not auspicious of happy musings. The bluff, off-hand lieutenant annoyed him — why need he be eternally gay? it was vexing to see a man always rattling nonsense. Shirley twisted his moustache in sheer irritation, and answered curtly: "No doubt orders will come at the proper time."

"Proper time! I'd like to know what the colonel calls proper time. The Indians are playing the devil at Witman's settlement; butchering the men, capturing the women, roasting the babies, and burning the houses; and, considering these mild eccentricities of the noble savage, I don't think it just the thing to wait. If I have a hand in their punishment, it will be on the 'no-quarter' principle."

Murray was encroaching on his fighting-spunk in summing up these late Indian atrocities, and looked fierce enough to wipe the last red man out of existence without regret or mercy. Drawing a tent-chair from under the table — one of the list kind, that accommodatingly shuts up and is willing to be stowed anywhere — the indignant

Murray folded his supple form into a sitting posture, crossed his long limbs, and, for a man not invited to do so, made himself quite at home.

Everybody in the regiment knew Phil Shirley — that he was violent-tempered, crabbed, and plucky, somewhat soured in mind, but brimful of fight, and never went back on his word. Murray was the only one the little captain was really attached to, and the only officer of his rank who was allowed or presumed on anything like familiarity with irascible Phil Shirley.

The lieutenant tipped back in his chair, locked his hands back of his curly head, and gave his silent comrade a protracted, meditative stare.

"What are you thinking of, cap — the girl you left behind you? Now, who the deuce is she, Phil? I've often been tempted to ask you. Some fair lady of the North, I wager, with cheeks like blush-roses, eyes blue as the heavens, and lips like dewy, ripe peaches. By Jove, the picture makes my mouth water! for, excepting greasy squaws, I have not seen anything approaching a woman these five years," lamented the lively Murray, giving his chair an extra tip, and his limbs a higher elevation.

Philip's brow darkened, and, shading his face from the single tallow candle sputtering at his elbow, made no other sign that he had heard or was interested in the loquacious lieutenant's conversation.

"Why in thunder do you let your luminary get so long a wick? Don't you know it's a bad omen — ill news, death, trouble, and so on through a host of evils, as the women have it? Where are the snuffers? I've a vein of superstition in me, and never like to see a candle-wick burn itself into a miniature cabbage-head."

As Phil did not produce the snuffers, Murray substituted his dexterous thumb and forefinger, and coolly pulled off

the offending wick, resuming his seat and the conversation at the same time.

"I say, Phil, would n't it be fun to go a-sparking? Just fancy some dear little village-maid, rigged out in her best, waiting for us of a Sunday night. Blest if I have not forgot how to spark a girl! I would have to trust to instinct and my personal charms," carefully folding up the list chair and restoring it to its place under the table. "I see you are not in a talking mood, and I'll not bore you. The mischief is, you are so infernally ambitious that it crowds everything else out of your heart. Now, I'd give my commission if a little girl I used to know would have consented to rough it with me, but she could not see a lieutenant's pay, promised to be my sister — humbug! — and married a rich old chap. God bless her!"

"I never took to blue-eyed village-maids," said Phil, sarcastically; "and I am vain enough to say that the girl I love will be willing to follow me to the devil if I ask it."

"Deuce take them all!" replied Murray, drawing on his gloves with a jerk. "I'll live and die a bachelor. The best of them are fickle jades, and not worth the offering of an honest love."

"By heavens, you wrong them," said the captain, looking as if he could kick Mr. Lieutenant Murray out of his tent with immense relief. "They are a d—d sight more loving and faithful than we are; and I have little respect for the man who traduces *all* women for the failings of *one*." Philip was at swearing heat, and growled an oath that Murray thought prudent not to hear. Smiling down on the angry captain, he said, admiringly:

"I am glad to see you pick up the cudgel so gallantly in defence of the dear creatures. I was only joking; but, by Jove, Phil, it was over a sore spot, though. Good night." The tall lieutenant picked up his cap, and with it in his hand — the limited height of Philip's tent did not admit

of any addition to his stature—lifted the canvas door to depart, but suddenly let it fall, and made a hasty dive into his pocket. "By George, I came near forgetting! Here is a letter—the Northern post just in;" and he carelessly tossed a daintily inscribed letter on the table, doubled himself through the canvas, and, to Shirley's relief, disappeared.

"From Davie," he said, drawing the candle nearer, and breaking the seal. This is what he read:

"DEAR BROTHER PHIL: This is just the saddest day that ever was. Rain, rain, rain, all day long; and so it ought, for we have lost our home sunshine. Oh! such a wretched, wretched thing as I have to tell you! Mamma's face is pitiable to see, and I could not help fainting away, it was so sudden and dreadful; and papa—you would not have thought that my matter-of-fact old father could have so trembled, and winked off the tears. I have not breathed it to any one but you, Philip; and only to you, because you were once so fond of her that I know you will keep the secret for the sake of auld lang syne. I can hardly avoid crying from thinking of it, and have written in a random way all around the sad subject, without telling you the real trouble. Oh, Phil! Genie has gone away—left in the night; and we don't know where she is."

The letter fell from his powerless hand to the floor; and a long, low groan burst from his lips. "Great God! am I to be doubly tormented! I thought her safe at the old place, and that time would soften her pride! Gone! Imogene gone! Where? I'd give my life to know. I was a pitiable dastard ever to leave her. I should have made myself master of her actions, against her harshest protests and at every hazard. Curse the petty boy-vanity that puffed up my giddy brain into thinking I was destined to achieve a splendid military fame! Exiled, like a criminal, to this cursed uncivilized country, to fight cursed ring-nosed Indians, who are not worth the powder it takes to

send them to perdition; and for this I sacrificed the noblest and most beautiful on earth. She did not shrink from a lieutenant's pay. No, by heavens! she begged on her knees, with her grand face illumined by the undying love she bore me, to be taken with me. 'Danger, poverty—anything, Philip, but our eternal separation.' I can see her uttering the prayer; a carpet of snow beneath her feet, and a flood of cold moonlight on her head—and she was mine! Yes! and by the Eternal, she *is* mine!"

He struck his clenched hands together, and strode about the narrow confines of his tent in a paroxysm of self-rage. The unfinished letter rustled when his heedless foot crushed its neat folds out of shape, and he snatched it up defiantly.

"I'll finish the thing; it can contain nothing worse!" He seated himself in a desperate calm of forced composure, and commenced to read where he had abruptly broken off to anathematize his own conscience:

"She left a note for mamma, saying she was going to Europe to find out about her mother. It always worried her—the not knowing who she was—and I suppose that is the reason why she disliked going into company, as if it could reflect on her. Oh, I can't realize that she is gone. Gone! what a dismal word! I never rightly understood its meaning before. I've been looking at her things—the books and dresses, the hat with the green ribbons, that reminded me of the days when she was your Gypsy, and her little gloves, with the impress of her pretty hand still in them. You remember Genie had the most beautiful hand in the world. It was like a funeral, Phil. I thought she must be dead, and that we were to bury her beside Elinor, as the last sad office of love. And I am afraid to sleep alone. I have divided everything with her from my cradle up, and now—now, oh, Phil! I'll have to stop, for the tears are blotting the page so that you will never be able to read it."

Several stains on the paper bore evidence that Davie's

eyes had indeed overflowed at this point, and that she must have employed some moments in drying them sufficient to allow of continuing her epistle:

"Everything is so still, and I'll never dare touch the piano again, or listen to the church-organ; for I am certain her ghost would appear at the slightest sound of either. You cannot guess how bad I am feeling, or how sick I am from crying. Our dear, dear, handsome Gypsy! gone! gone! gone! The rain sobs it on the window-panes, the wet leaves whisper it, and the treetops nod it at me. Everything she loved persists in shouting it, until I am ready to wish I had neither eyes nor ears nor a memory of Imogene left.

"Something put it into my head to write to you. Of course *you* cannot feel as *we* do; but as you once knew her, you may sympathize just a little with your forever poor, sisterless sister, DAVIE."

It would be difficult to tell how many times Philip read the simple girlish letter of simple girlish Davie, before throwing it on the table, and resigning himself to an hour of bitter remorse, the most harrowing that ever laid a brave, proud soul in the dust of self-condemnation. Davie had written it in the first moment of keen distress; and at the disjointed beginning, Philip thought it was the death of a pet kitten, or some other dumb favorite, she was about to chronicle. He knew the sweet child was given to prefacing her little home matters with a long preamble as a choice condiment to the sauce of the subject, and her innocent manner of relating Imogene's disappearance added a greater poignancy to the blow. Suddenly he fell to hating the very sight of the smooth and inoffensive-looking letter that had cost unconscious Davie so many tears and sighs, and seizing it vengefully, he tore it into a hundred fragments.

"I feel better," he laughed horribly, and glared around as if he had vanquished a deadly foe. "I'll take a dash

in the open air, and see if I can't exorcise this foul nightmare that is making a fool of me. I've got a shot in my heart now, if I never had before. Imogene knew where a blow would hurt the worst, and she has not hesitated to strike. The beautiful sorceress may count from this moment the triumph of a complete revenge."

The distorting look that accompanied the words had not yet vanished, when the canvas was hastily thrust aside, and Lieutenant Murray, flushed and eager, sprang quickly in.

"Mount, my boy, mount! Here are your orders, and you must be in the saddle and on the trail in half an hour. You are to command the advance, and here is the authority," throwing down a scrawled bit of paper directly under the gleaming eye of the captain. "The red rascals are in force, and there is a hot fight ahead."

"Good!" cried Shirley, springing up, and laughing so appallingly that Murray involuntarily recoiled. "You are an intolerable chatterer, but I'll forgive it for the sake of this good news."

"Man alive, are you going mad!" exclaimed the astonished lieutenant, stepping back to get a better look at him. "By the light of this infamous candle you are literally sardonic."

"Am I? Then you know how bad I want to get at those murdering heathens. I am dying to spill blood! I could hack the heart out of an enemy to-night, and curse him that he had but one. Hell and fury, lieutenant! there are fifty thousand devils in me, all clamoring for a fight!"

"I believe you, cap; and, by the host of Mars, I pity the red scalpers if you come up with them, for you look a very demon."

"Then am I doubly armed," returned the other, thrusting a pair of heavy revolvers into his belt, and buckling on his spurs; "and if I don't do some bloody work this night, then my name is not Philip Shirley."

"But you are not going to wear that cloak? Don't be reckless, Phil; life is life, and it is lined with red, a conspicuous mark, and always reminds me of a gypsy."

"Of whom, sir?"

"Why, a gypsy. Ain't it something like what the girls wear in the tableau of the 'Gypsy Fortune-teller?'"

"D—n the cloak, no!" thundered Phil, throwing it from him; the hot, infuriated language keeping pace with the increasing blaze of the flashing eyes gleaming under the ponderous brow like living coals. "What do I know of gypsies, or the mummery tableau of school-girls! Come on, or you will drive me into being more wicked than I am;" and, leading the way, the irate captain went out, the taller officer striding close at his heels in a maze of doubt regarding his superior's sanity.

Phil did spill blood that night, and in the darkness and desperation of that savage prairie fight, obtained a foretaste of the splendid victories a long and fearful civil war was to lay at his feet; and those who witnessed his daring and ferocity that night said Captain Shirley was born for the army, and that he would eventually win the proudest laurels. But the speedy death he wished did not come. Bullets sang harmlessly by, the well-aimed tomahawk missed its mark, and the stealthy knife failed to reach his heart. Others fell, but he escaped unscathed, and was not thankful that he was spared. His life was valueless, and the quicker rid of the better; he would expose it at every opportunity, and die fighting, as a soldier should. It was a species of self-murder, but he did not care. Glory and fame had sunk to nothing. Imogene was gone.

CHAPTER XXXII.

IN PARIS.

BEAUTIFUL, fascinating, wicked Paris! many miles lie between the gay, gorgeous, French capital and the humble Ohio homestead; yet here we find Imogene transplanted from the lowly roof that had sheltered her childhood, to richly furnished drawing-rooms and the company of the great.

Two young ladies idling away a morning in Paris is nothing uncommon; but when the two are Imogene Vale and Olive Colburn, we pause to contemplate them, and ascertain what old Father Time has been about since we left them on the other side of the Atlantic. "Extremes meet," is a trite saying, and they certainly had in this case. But to go back a little in our history. Mr. Colburn had said nothing to his daughter about the companion he had selected to accompany her across the ocean, merely mentioning that the lady decided upon would meet them on board the steamer, and she need give herself no further anxiety regarding the matter. Olive was easily satisfied, and it so happened that Imogene did not see her young mistress until they were ploughing through the crested waves of the blue deep. Imogene felt that she was striving for a higher duty than the duty left behind, and there was no regret mingled with the thoughts of the loved ones that every plunge of the ship separated further and further.

Lot Colburn was at her state-room door, waiting to present her to his daughter, who was enjoying the delicious breeze and grand ocean view from the deck, watching the sparkling waves rise and fall, as she had watched the forming and breaking bubbles of the fountain.

"Olive, this is Miss Vale, the lady engaged, I trust, for

your mutual pleasant companionship. My daughter, Miss Vale."

Olive extended her hand, and the member handed a chair, both of which Imogene took, the one in warmest gratitude, the other from sudden dizziness, and a queer sensation, as if the sea did not agree with the tranquillity of her physical organization. It passed away, however, without further unpleasant demonstrations; but Imogene did not seem disposed to converse. Persons at sea for the first time are not expected to be animated and interesting during the nauseating initiation of old Neptune's rules, and Miss Vale was not loath to avail herself of the privilege, and, leaning her head against the cushion of her chair, gazed off across the heaving billows, unconscious of everything but that she was sailing toward the land of her birth. The few passengers who had not succumbed to seasickness cast admiring glances in her direction, sauntering along the guards to get a better view of the dark, exquisite face, with its crown of lustrous hair and half-closed eyes of liquid light. Olive looked at her in wonder. It was the most beautiful countenance she ever beheld; she had dreamed of pictured beauty, and this was like it. The rich, tropical complexion and languid air gave her the charm of some rare old painting, gazing out upon a summer sea in a sublime repose of form and mind.

"Vale! where have I heard the name before?" mused Olive.

Her thoughts went backward to the dear Western home. She was sitting under the willow by the fountain, a boy lieutenant by her side, who sketched a portrait in the spray, with eyes and hair like the girl's before her. Leaning forward, she touched the passive white hand:

"You are Imogene Vale?"

"Yes."

"And from Alden?"

"Yes."

"You know Philip Shirley?"

"Yes."

The laconic affirmatives were uttered without turning her head or lifting her eyes from the turbulent water.

They were quite alone — Lot Colburn, at a little distance, bending in a preoccupied revery over the rail, and the passengers, either singly or in groups, intent on their personal comfort or pleasure. The leaves of the open book in Olive's lap, idly turned by the wind, rustled back and forth in a dreamy, sense-lulling way, but she did not hear it. Olive was pondering on the past, and, as if there had been no pause in the conversation, resumed:

"I knew you from his description. Philip told me once that if I had never seen Imogene Vale, I had never seen a beautiful girl in all my life; and I am now convinced that he was right."

"Captain Shirley is far too prodigal of his compliments."

Olive did not detect the covert sneer in the equivocal reply:

"I do not think so. No one less a judge could say otherwise. If my questions seem impertinent, you will forgive them, for, although comparatively strangers, we are to be friends. And I hope you will like me as well as I know I shall like you."

"I feel deeply honored by your confidence, and to serve you will be both a duty and a pleasure. I am in your service, Miss Colburn, and only anxious to please you."

"Then I will put your sincerity to immediate test, and implore you to call me plain Olive, for I am going to call you Imogene from this moment."

Genie smiled, and a good deal of the coldness melted out of her voice.

"I shall more than like you; I shall love you, Olive."

The dark eyes left the sea and came full and tender to

the wan, childish face, lighted up by the flitting prettiness of sudden joy, that an instant after filled the steel-gray eyes with as sudden tears.

"I am a poor, little, lame creature, almost a child in stature, and, I fear, in mind. I am not cross, but sometimes, when the pain is severe, I am so petulant and fretful that I don't know what to do with myself; and now you know the worst of me, Imogene."

"And I am quick-tempered, unyielding, and not oversocial. I do not wear my heart on my sleeve, and whatsoever burdens I have I bear them alone. I face my trials firmly, and, if I have lost the woof of happiness, I have gathered up the remaining threads whereon to build a better and a surer hope. It is best to be frank at the beginning. My being here may have struck you as singular, and what I am about to say may seem more so. It is my earnest wish that every one in Alden, and especially Philip Shirley, should know absolutely nothing of where I am. I am not a capricious woman, and you will believe me when I say it is essential to my peace and the success of my mission; for I have an object in visiting Europe, which is known to Mr. Colburn, and who, at my urgent request, permitted me to become his daughter's companion. And you will keep my secret, nor think the less of me, Olive?"

"Not a whit the less, Imogene. And your secret is safe with me. But you were such sworn friends, you and Philip, that it—it makes me a little curious."

"I was a child then, and of all the world I detest Philip Shirley most. He dared to reproach me with my mother's memory. You knew her history, Olive; it is the common property of Alden. He meanly and cowardly threw it in my teeth—talked of love and taunted me of my low birth in the same breath. Slandered my dead mother, and with the base falsehood on his lips, would have kissed *me*. Do you wonder I hate his viperous memory, and despise his

very name? It is that mother's vindication I seek, and the clearing up of all mystery clinging to me. Philip Shirley is a villain!"

"And I am sorry," said Olive. "Papa says he will be a great soldier, and I—I like him."

Imogene looked at her suspiciously. "You do? Then I pity you. I pity every one—every woman—who *likes* Philip Shirley."

Olive winced, and thought, "Imogene hates him, but is there any need or cause of my doing so? I may get strong. Papa has unbounded faith in him, and I—he may not be so far from me, after all." It was selfish, but it was human, and in her heart. It was like a woman, and Olive was a woman, and the cloud to Imogene was a ray of sunshine to her. She repented the next minute, ashamed of rearing her air-castle on the ruins of another's, and shyly asked: "But you loved him once?"

"Perhaps I did, but it was a derision of love. He laughed it to scorn, and I disowned it. We will speak of something else."

This was conclusive, and Olive immediately changed the subject.

"You are very accomplished, so I have heard the village people say."

"I play well, and read French fluently. I mention the latter that you may avail yourself of it in reading together on board. If you are not sufficiently acquainted with the language to admit of ready conversation, it will be of great help to you."

"How thoughtful of you! I am a very indifferent French scholar, indeed; and I will be glad to brush up what little I do know before arriving at Paris. I have always had such wretched health that study, and everything else, has been difficult and laborious; not a pleasure, as with you. Papa fancies that a protracted residence

abroad will vastly benefit me, but I don't entertain such very sanguine hopes from a change of scene and climate."

Olive glanced doubtingly at her thin hands, and sighed reflectively.

"I am inclined to think with your father," said Genie, cheerfully.

"I don't know; perhaps you are right," she replied, slowly closing the book. "If you will help me to my state-room, I'll get the French books. I was wise enough to place them handy before starting, and if you are not afraid of becoming sea-sick, we will read an hour."

Genie hastened to adjust the crutches, looking the pity she felt.

"There, now, you are pitying me; I see it in your face," said Olive, in playful sadness.

And, for answer, Imogene kissed the little hand clinging to the silver-banded crutch.

Once established in Paris, Olive's health rapidly improved, to her own wonder, and the untold delight of her father and Imogene, who watched and cared for her, mentally and physically, with the untiring devotion of a sister. A fall in her childhood had resulted in an incurable hip complaint, and the many physicians consulted at home had unanimously agreed that there was no help for poor Olive's painful lameness. But in spite of their wise decisions, here in Paris, under the best medical treatment, Miss Colburn was actually improving. She treated Imogene more as a dear sister than a hired companion, and they sang and played and read together, enjoying life to the full, and making the most of what happiness a bitter disappointment had left to the one, and long sickness to the other.

But Imogene never lost sight of the one deep object of her soul. A year, two, three, five passed—still it was only a shadow, a dream as intangible as when first conceived. Twice a year she wrote to Ruth, entering into no details;

simply dating it "Paris," and ending "unsuccessful yet, Aunt Ruth, but not despairing."

One evening, Lot Colburn entered the drawing-room where Olive and Imogene sat quietly sewing, with a bundle of New York papers in his hand, and wearing a countenance of exceeding perturbation. "Dreadful news from home, ladies. Civil war is proclaimed in America. The whole United States are in arms. The rebels have captured Fort Sumter. Virginia has repudiated the old flag; every Slave State is in open rebellion; and a hundred thousand Yankees are marching to the South."

"Civil war!" Imogene echoed the words involuntarily. Of the marching hosts she saw but one, and him she *hated.* Yet to her perverse heart he comprised the Union army. Olive was completely overwhelmed. "How can the South be so unwise?"

"Unwise; they are wicked, obstinate con—" the precise member almost swore—"fools! If I were ten years younger I would take a musket and step into the ranks to help teach them a lesson."

"What will be the result?" asked Olive, timorously.

"Result! why, the South will be annihilated, slavery torn up by the roots, and every man of wealth or position who takes part in it irredeemably ruined." Lot could have made a tremendous speech if he had had the floor, and audience to do it justice. His patriotism was all aflame, and he felt strongly inclined to hurl his loyal opinions at somebody, if it were only two amazed girls. "But if I am too old to go myself, I have a sturdy substitute in the field, who will fight till the old flag floats over Sumter again," cried the member, triumphantly. "You will find Shirley on the right side; he will never desert the cause *I* love, nor betray the country that educated him to defend her in the hour of peril. Little Captain Phil has now a chance to distinguish himself. I remember he said that all he asked

of the United States was plenty of tough old fights, and now methinks he will get it to the utmost of his desires."

"Captain Shirley: we shall find him in the hottest of the struggle, fighting, and, if need be, dying bravely," said Olive, glancing covertly at Imogene, whose face was as serene as a summer morning. Mr. Colburn went out to talk it over with a few particular friends; and, after he was gone, she said lightly, more to test Imogene's real feelings toward Philip than anything else, "This is a dreadful budget of most unwelcome news for papa to leave with us, and I suppose that, like loyal Americans and true, we must commence practising patriotic airs. But how fearful to know that they are actually fighting, brother against brother, in dear old Yankee-land. My heart is with the blue, and here is to the loyal North;" and sitting down to the piano, she began playing "Hail Columbia," Genie joining in the chorus from her seat at the centre-table, diligently plying her needle meanwhile, the marked serenity and industry of which plainly indicated that Olive's innocent little ruse had failed, and that Imogene was not to be taken off her guard.

Every foreign mail was anxiously watched for, and the arrival of the New York steamer a most important event to at least three Americans in Paris. The sound of her father's step in the hall put Olive all in a flutter of dread, for on such occasions he was sure to be the *avant-coureur* of bloody tidings, disastrous or otherwise, of the war. One day he came in more elated than usual. "It is looking brighter for the Union than at last accounts. Phil is coming up from the obscurity of the border like a young lion. He is at the head of a fine regiment, and pushing through the western part of the Confederacy like an avalanche, and, if not hampered, his promotion will be rapid and his victories decisive; for on a field of his own he will be the hardest kind of an officer to whip. And to show

you how he remembers and keeps his word, I will open the package that I have in the hall. Bring it in, Sam!" This was to the waiting servant outside, the identical Alden Sam, who had first piloted Philip to the member's study. Sam obeyed, and, surrounded by the wondering Olive, the attentive Imogene, and the delighted honorable, the package was brought in, and a stand of shot-and-shell-torn rebel colors brought to view. On one of the largest of the three tattered battle-flags was pinned a scrap of paper:

"ON THE FIELD, BEFORE THE ENEMY.

"I promised to send my first colors to you, and here they are. PHIL. SHIRLEY."

It was a proud moment for Lot Colburn, and he shook out the ragged banners as exultingly as if a son had captured them. Olive handled the dust-and-powder-begrimed silk caressingly, and thought, "Genie is mistaken. He is not a villain — a man so thoroughly brave cannot be, He may have erred, but Philip Shirley *is not* a villain!"

Imogene was not looking at the flags, but holding the scrap of paper in her hand so tenderly that you might have thought it an imprisoned butterfly. Discovering shrewd little Miss Colburn's cautious glance, she said indifferently: "Keep this, Olive; Colonel Shirley will be great, and in the future you may be proud of this hasty scrawl."

"I love my friends better than myself, and bestow it on you, Imogene — the dear-prized souvenir of a gallant soldier."

"No," said Imogene, placing it lingeringly on the table. "He will never be great to me; I admired him most in a shabby jacket, and the glitter of a uniform has no charm."

Olive laughed skeptically, and tossed the paper into her workbox.

Three years went by, and still the terrible conflict raged in America. Bloody details of the awful carnage swept

over the sea, and penetrated the bright, luxurious room where Olive and her companion watched from afar the progress of the Union armies. Again and again up and down the long columns of the killed, wounded, and missing scanned the black eyes, and the blue, each searching for a name that they prayed God was not there. They knew that Philip had won his general's star, and, in command of a division, was laying waste Virginia. Utter death and desolation followed his army, and where he struck he conquered.

One evening, Olive sought the ominous column, and read aloud to the placidly interested Imogene: "Terrible slaughter! Colonel Murray, of General Shirley's staff, severely wounded. The most desperate battle of the war! Fifteen thousand killed! General Shirley mortally wounded"—

"Oh!" Imogene half rose from her chair, and fell back again, as if a shot had struck her heart. Her face might have been a stone for all the look of life it had. Both quick-raised hands fell helpless to her lap, a blue shade crept to the parted lips, the great black eyes, wide open, dilated, and fixed, were like the expressionless eyes of the dead.

It was early evening, and the gas-jets overhead lit up the appalling countenance to a ghastly white brilliancy, bathing in softest light each pallid feature, and the still corpse-like figure. Olive was shocked out of all notice of Imogene, her face blanching to ashes, with transfixed eyes, that would not leave the name, that she fancied was getting larger and larger, and spreading all over the paper in letters of blood.

"Poor, brave-hearted Philip!" she sobbingly whispered. "And to be mortally wounded, worse than killed, bleeding—dying on the trampled field."

"It is a lie!" shrieked Imogene, snatching the paper from her hands, and tearing it into fragments. "A detestable lie! In the face of my country's great calamity, in

the hour of America's utmost danger, and greatest need, Death *dare not* strike down Philip Shirley. He was born to free enslaved millions, and save the struggling North — to sustain the right, and crush treason! He was born to command, to fight, and conquer, but not to die, as this would have."

She turned proudly, and left the room. A portion of the torn paper touched her flowing robe, and slightly rustled as it swept over it. She lifted her dress as if the harmless fragments were imbrued with a deadly poison.

"A new version of a strange soul," was Olive's comment when alone, astounded at her vehement display of temper. "Oh, no; she did not love him! She hated Philip! Oh! my heart; she neither loves nor hates him — she worships him; and my little presumptuous flame must flicker out before this stronger, sublimer blaze. Yet I am getting so well, and not so lame; and I thought — ah, the dream was sweet, and I weep, I weep for it, Philip; and you are dead, and you will never know how I have loved you."

Olive laid so quiet among the cushions on the sofa that you might have supposed her sleeping, but the hand under her cheek was wet with tears.

In her room, Imogene was pacing like a caged lioness; no tears nor sighs for her, no abject prostration. She confronted her misery boldly, and talked to it as if it were a thing distinct from herself and capable of understanding.

"We were separated forever; but while you were in the world, Philip, the world was not quite so dark. Why am I left to smite the air and almost hate existence? O heart! will you never cease struggling? Break, die, anything that will bring forgetfulness. O love! will you never stay buried, or is it that Philip is dead you revive again?"

A subdued rap, and Olive's voice without the door restored her self-command sufficiently to open it.

"Oh, Imogene, do let me come in! It was a false report. Papa just came with later news of the battle."

"I did not believe it."

"But it gave you a dreadful turn, as well as myself."

"I told you I had a hasty temper."

"Don't summon the hard look, Imogene. I know you now, and judge something of your heart by my own." Olive kissed her in Davie's little, purring fashion. "And I would not strive for the old assumption of indifference. Philip has not lived out his destiny. God is guarding him for some good purpose. We will thank Him for the great victory he has won, for it facilitates Sherman's proud march to the sea, and brings yet nearer the wings of hovering peace. And as we are rid of that horrid newspaper incubus, I suppose I may say that papa insists on dragging us to the court ball next week; and as there is no help for it, we must make up our minds to endure the infliction. I am sure I hardly know how to reflect about a dress after such a scare."

"I shall not honor mine with any great amount of solicitude," replied Genie. "As a companion, I presume, the simpler the more appropriate."

"Companion; fiddle! I am absolutely nobody without you. I am such a scrimp of a woman that only something magnificent like you keeps me in countenance. I am eight years your senior, and ten to one but everybody will take me for your chaperon. I am condemned to single blessedness, but you will marry, and certainly nothing less than a coronet will become your regal brow. You need not look so frightened; you shall not be married unless you want to. I will not carry my authority so far. Good night. I know you are longing to be alone;" and little Olive tripped away.

The woman was very different from the girl Philip had carried down the steps. The crutches had long since been abandoned, and a slight halt, that a full trailing dress and

slow languid walk greatly aided to conceal, was the only remaining indication of the old painful, one-sided limp.

The moment she was gone, Imogene sprang up.

"Now, stubborn heart, you shall bend!" and smiling, with her radiant face turned toward the far shores of America, she reached out her hand to the distant land where *he* was fighting for liberty and the triumph of a nation — her voice a whisper, soft and sweet, an angel might have envied:

"Philip, I forgive thee! Ah, more; I love thee. *I love thee!* I have long denied it, and to the world I ever shall. But to my own soul, that thou art not dead this night, I'll say it until the self-admission softens the anguish of these many years."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE COURT BALL.

THE imperial Tuileries were all ablaze with light, and gathered in the magnificent saloon was the best nobility of France. The splendid court-dresses, velvet and gold, silk, satin, lace, and diamonds, shimmering everywhere, seemed like a continuation of the music and untold magnificence of the gorgeous palace. And there, surrounded by titled lords and ladies, are Olive and Imogene. It was not their first court ball, for since their arrival in Paris, seven years ago, Imogene had frequented balls, *fêtes*, and opera in search of a clue to her parentage. She was confident that the upper circles of Parisian society contained what she was seeking, and, ostensibly as Miss Colburn's duenna, she haunted scenes of mirth and festivity with the ardor of a devotee. Olive, in pale-blue satin and

pearls, looked pure and sweet as her own home-daisies, but expressed a deal more delight in Imogene's dress than her own, because, as she frequently affirmed, she had the face and form to do it justice. To-night it was a rose-colored silk, trimmed about the waist and sleeves with white lace, and, except the small ruby brooch at her throat, she wore not a single jewel; a few scarlet rosebuds in her hair, that was simply arranged in a mass of ebon curls at the back of her graceful head.

"You are beautiful!" cried Olive, "even in that prim dress. It brings your beauty out superbly. You will drive the dress-enhanced belles of the evening to despair."

Imogene smiled. "You are a little flatterer, Olive; Mr. Colburn is waiting."

The member was very proud of his charge, for he saw that, amid all the congregated beauty of the palace, Imogene was uneclipsed.

"By my soul!" cried a gentleman in French to his companion, a tall, dark man in an elegant court costume, and cosmopolitan air, "there is a magnificent creature."

"Where?"

"Why, there, on the right of Lord Radcliffe."

"What, the one in rose-color? On the honor of a connoisseur you are right; that is the grandest face in Paris. Who is she? I'd like to know her."

"Ah! my dear marquis, don't be too eager. She is handsome, but a nobody."

"A nobody! She looks a duchess to the manor born. There is not a crowned lady in Europe that can boast a head so naturally royal, or a manner more regal. Note the queenly bow she returns in response to the salutation of that haughty German prince. I've seen a few women in my peregrinations around the globe, and she surpasses them all. This star must have risen since I left Paris. By the Lord, count, she is imperial!"

"Imperial! *Chacun à son gout.* Do you see the lady to the left?" said the count.

"The insignificant-looking girl in blue?" shrugged the marquis, disdainfully.

"The same. *Ma foi*, you are ungallant. She is an heiress and an American, and to a man like myself, with a title, but without money, she is *not* insignificant. Your queenly one is her companion, a mere duenna; pooh!"

"Companion or not, she attracts me." The marquis deliberately lifted his glass and honored the lady in rose-color with a lengthy stare. He was a handsome, *ennuied*-looking man of fifty, or thereabout, well preserved, of cynical aspect and haughty bearing. His eyes were large, black, and full of youthful fire, and although he had managed to keep the frost from his glossy black hair, there was no disguising the line of slight wrinkles on his bold, white forehead, nor the trace of crow-tracks about the corners of the alluring eyes. By a process known only to himself and his valet, the marquis still retained a faultlessly-trimmed dark moustache of surprising luxuriance and juvenility, and, take him altogether, he seemed a favorite with Time, who had dealt tenderly with the masculine beauty of the fashionably dissipated Marquis de la Vahl—a prince in wealth, and a peer of France, who knew the world, and had seen all it contained; who had tasted of every pleasure, folly, and genteel sin in the universe, and was ready to exclaim, "There is nothing new under the sun." The marquis lowered his glass and turned peremptorily to the penniless count. "What do you know of her?"

"That she is of French parentage, born in America, highly educated, but of no family literally, for she is an orphan, without sister or brother; make a note of the last—I know your proclivities. She is a finished musician, and, God be thanked, speaks French like a native; on the whole, an uncommonly gifted creature, and since the Empress be-

stowed such marked notice on her this evening, she may become the rage. The lady in blue is a Miss Colburn, and her father quite a distinguished man, an ex-member of the lower House. They were presented by the American ambassador."

"I must be introduced; do you know them?"

"Not personally, but an acquaintance can easily be effected."

"The father, I presume, is a vulgar North American politician, with a voice and manner to set a gentleman's teeth on edge. I have met some atrocious specimens of his class — bawling demagogues, ignorant of the first principles of society; but I will endure the *père*, for his exquisite taste in selecting chaperons is truly wonderful."

The count elevated his right shoulder.

"Well, Monsieur le Marquis, yonder is the *père* — the middle-aged gentleman conversing with Mr. Dix. Do you know the American minister?"

"I have been presented."

"Then all you have to do is to embrace the opportunity, not the *object*, and you know yon beauteous lady?"

The marquis immediately acted on the count's suggestion, and suddenly was expressing a warm friendship for Mr. Dix. The Frenchman was slightly mistaken in the "vulgar North American politician," and not a little discomfited at Lot Colburn's dignified acknowledgment of his acquaintance. The calm steel-gray eyes fastened on the cynical, world-wise face of the marquis searchingly, when he craved the honor of knowing his daughter and his *niece*.

"Miss Vale is not a relative, but she is my daughter's dearest friend," said the member, significantly implying that the Frenchman's polite hypocrisy was understood.

"I beg pardon."

The nobleman bowed profoundly, evidently greatly repenting his intentional blunder.

Mr. Colburn was a quick, keen diviner of physiognomy,

and there was something about the carefully preserved features of the marquis that struck him as both peculiar and familiar, as if he had seen its counterpart before in another land, and in a different form; yet it was a strange face, and one he intuitively distrusted.

"He is still a fine-looking and courtly appearing man, and in his youth must have been a woman's perfection of manly beauty. They spoiled him, no doubt; hence the *roué* and cynic that he is," thought Lot.

The marquis misconstrued his hesitation, and cogitated on his part:

"Papa is cautious, and sees to it that no hawks gain access to his doves."

A break in the crowd, and Lord Radcliffe came up with the "doves." "The Fates are propitious," murmured the peer, and in a second the formalities of the introduction were gone through with, and Imogene's hand was on his arm. The marquis considered it an occasion worthy of his best. The *ennuied* air vanished, and he was the animated, vivacious, accomplished Marquis de la Vahl, sensible that the most beautiful woman in Eugenie's royal saloons was on his arm, and the magnet of every eye, admiring, envious, and jealous.

Imogene was conscious of a singular thrill of pleasure mingled with dislike, at the touch of her hand on his velvet sleeve. He paused in a remote angle of the grand saloon — a fairy place, where flowers were blooming, perfumes exhaling, and water dropping from crystal vases among rare exotics and feathery ferns. The marquis spoke excellent English, tinged by a slight foreign accent that was only perceptible in moments of great *empressement.*

"I fancy we are as near Paradise as mortals this side of the golden gates are permitted," said the marquis, glancing at the splendid *entourage* of their sheltered nook. "Life is beautiful, Miss Vale; I am fond of living."

"I know it," she returned. "You have it written on your face; but I have not found it so. Life with me is a burden that I'll at any time willingly lay down."

The marquis was startled. Was she affecting this as young-lady sentimentality, or was she in earnest? The Frenchman was wary of women ambitious of a monument, but the one glance of the beautiful sad eyes dissipated the doubt. They went down from his gaze without a blush or a tremble, convincing him that she meant what she said, and that he, nor any one, would ever be anything to her dead heart.

"You are young to have worn out life."

"I am old in the troubles life entails."

"It is best to forget them. Let the old flowers die, and plant new."

"If you can. I feel strangely confidential to-night."

"And I strangely good," quickly responded the marquis; and he meant it, too. The better feelings that had slept for years stirred again in his pleasure-loving soul, and he wished the pure thoughts and nobler sentiments this girl inspired had always been his—that they would always remain with him. Imogene he reverenced and respected as he had reverenced and respected but one woman in his reckless life, and *her he killed.* Not a murder as the law construes it, but to his conscience it was very like it. She was standing a little from him, silent and thoughtful, and the hand he placed on hers, resting on the edge of a Parian vase, neither surprised nor embarrassed her.

"Can we be friends, Miss Vale?" The hand resting on the vase went quietly to his arm.

"In that I like and dislike you, we will be friends."

He was confounded. She saw it, but did not change color or hesitate.

"Paris says I am not given to hasty likings, even those the most worthy, much less a stranger like the Marquis de

la Vahl, whom my woman instinct points out unprincipled toward my sex."

"If a man had said as much —"

"You would have challenged him for telling the truth?"

"How can I regain your good opinion?"

"Regain? You have never had it. I was drawn to you without it, and, in spite of myself, I like you without."

"You are a strange woman."

"Yes, but stranger to-night than ever before. Now take me to Miss Colburn. We go home early."

The astonished and confused marquis complied, and in a few moments she had bade him good-night, and was gone from the gay assembly. Shortly after he left the palace; the glitter and splendor was stale and insipid without her; and the next day and the next he thought of nothing but Imogene Vale.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

BEFORE THE BATTLE.

ALL day long a heavy cannonade had reverberated among the Virginia hills. A canopy of smoke lay along the Blue Ridge, and the sun hid his face from the scene. The thunder of artillery met the thunder of heaven, and the pitying clouds dropped their oceans of tears on the crimson field, to wash out the stains from the trampled sod, and bathe the cold faces of twice six thousand dead soldiers strewn over the plain, and sprinkled the brow of the dying braves in the reeking Shenandoah valley.

Since daylight a hundred thousand men had confronted each other in mortal hate. The retreating rebel army, de-

feated, but still determined, withdrew to reform their shattered columns and hope for reinforcements; and the Union troops, worn and exhausted, lay down on their arms, waiting to renew the battle with the morning.

Ten miles in the rear of the advance, in a leaky shelter-tent, sat the commanding general. He had just arrived from the front, wet and mud-splashed from the high cavalry boots to the slouching hat. Throwing off his cloak and side-arms, he spread a map of Virginia before him, and fell to studying the route of the Shenandoah.

Satisfied of the practicability of overtaking and destroying the remainder of the Confederate forces, he pushed the map from him, and, resting his head on the rude table, for an hour remained perfectly quiet, sleeping or thinking, it were difficult to tell, but the attitude was that of a man completely fatigued in body and worn out in mind.

Lifting his head slowly from its hard pillow, you would be surprised to see in this stern-eyed, bronze-faced chieftain, the little Phil of Alden's censure. Yet it was Philip Shirley, hard lines of care on his face, and gray hairs thick about his temples. The large head, carrying the safety and success of an immense army, seemed to have expanded to meet the exigencies and terrific responsibilities pressing upon the great brain.

The hardy general had not slept for twenty hours, but the fire in his eye was not dim, nor the muscles of the grim mouth relaxed. Philip had lost his transfiguring smile, and as that was all the beauty he ever possessed, his face was harsh—almost repellent, and nothing in the world in it now that Olive or Davie could ever love. He was little more than thirty-five, but he might have been fifty and looked younger.

Trouble, a trouble that no one had ever guessed, and hard service, exposure in the field, rough fare, and rough duty, knocked all the youth out of him early. The only

thing that was natural about him was his voice. Even in the most desperate moments, surrounded by seething masses of furiously charging men, his rapid commands had a touch of the old low-toned sweetness. It was few who dared approach this fierce-eyed general with disastrous news, for his temper had increased with years and power, and the tidings of a repulse in *his* corps aroused him to ungovernable anger. It was the escape-valve for the concealed bitterness cankering his heart, and that had shrivelled up the boy-fun and generosity, leaving the worse passions to predominate. Those who had witnessed his violent outbreaks were not zealous of his presence when the thunder-cloud was on his brow. Addicted to the use of profuse expletives when in a passion, he hurled his anathemas right and left, without stopping to choose his words, or care on whom they fell. It was after midnight, and, sitting there in the gloom of the one candle, his face was thoughtful even to sadness. He sighed audibly, compressing his lips sternly after the escaped tenderness. "How many of my poor fellows dead and mangled to-night, I wonder? I dread to see the list. How long will this horrible butchery last? Where will this war end? How long must I lead brave men to death? Of a truth, blood follows my footsteps. I remember the prophesy, and the crimson river runs unabated," he muttered, just as a galloping horse stopped before his tent. An officer plunged through the torn canvas, and, in breathless haste, exclaimed:

"Come, for God's sake, general. The enemy, reinforced by ten thousand fresh troops, have attacked the right wing. The ranks are broken, and if the panic cannot be checked the whole advance is lost."

General Shirley looked at his aide-de-camp without a word, but a whistling breath went through his shut teeth, and the lines on his brow became scowling furrows from temple to temple. Colonel Murray, the favorite aide,

and the only one of his staff who volunteered to carry to Shirley the disastrous news, noticed the gathering fury, but it was not a time for hesitation. "I bear a verbal message from General Howe that he must fall back if help did not speedily arrive. His exhausted troops are contending against overwhelming odds, and they cannot meet another onset."

"Out with it, Murray," cried the general, an ominous calm in his voice. "Do you mean to say that my army is retreating?"

"Yes, sir; and the retreat will be general if not instantly checked."

"Hell!" shouted the general, leaping to his feet. "What officer in my command dare send me news like this? I left Howe the guardian of a hard-won field, and the coward has tossed the victory back to the rebels; curse him! I do not know how to retreat, but I do to advance. What have we lost?"

"Fifteen guns, our camp, tents—"

A tremendous oath silenced the aide. "They must be retaken. I never lost a gun or a tent in my life, and I swear I never will. What time is it?"

"It lacks an hour and a half of being daylight."

"What columns are broken?"

"The second division is in utter confusion."

"Order my horse; I go with the second division," thundered the incensed chief. "They must retrieve their own, or never come out of the fight."

Murray departed. Shirley's war-spirit was up once more, and he rattled his sword into its scabbard with an emphasis that threatened the bright silver mountings, seized his hat, and strode from the tent. A coal-black charger, held by the straightest of orderlies, was waiting to receive him. His foot was in the stirrup when the boom of a heavy gun sounded in the distance, another and another rolled through

the darkness. Murray, standing beside his horse near by, turned his head in the direction of the reports.

"They are at it, general."

"Yes, the battle is on again."

For a moment the general sat erect in the saddle, buried in thought. Then he raised his head and gathered up the bridle.

"I ride alone, Murray."

He uttered a hasty order, and, despatching the aide-de-camp in another direction, dashed away in the pale starlight. Emerging into the road, he put spurs to his steed and flew like the wind toward the scene of danger. Never did a horse come to the road with greater speed, and never was there greater need of haste. Faster and nearer boomed the guns, until the air was filled with the incessant roar. On, on, horse and rider scented the smoke of the conflict. The morning-star sat above the curtain of daylight, but the foam-flecked charger did not flag. On, on, the breeze came ladened with the rattle of musketry, the tramp of horses, and shouts of men. Another mile and General Shirley plunged into the *débris* of his routed army. Broken gun-carriages, abandoned arms, flying soldiers, panic-stricken officers, maddened horses, infantry, cavalry, artillery, one wild, disorganized mass. Screams, and shouts, and groans, and curses mingled in the fearful uproar, and the yell of the elated rebels echoing above it all. General Shirley rode into the tumult calm outwardly, as if on review. But there was lightning in his eye, a slumbering devil of a smile about his mouth, and his grating teeth were gnashing execrations that, if uttered aloud, would have made confusion worse confounded, robbed him of every hard-earned laurel, wiped out of existence what was six hours before a splendid, victorious army, and spread dismay, dissatisfaction, and grief throughout the country. The prudent, sagacious general smothered his rage, concealed his tem-

per, changed his tactics, and was equal to the emergency. His fighting qualities had made him the idol of the soldiers, who readily forgive oaths and anger, but not timidity, in a commander.

He would master the situation by his single bravery. Waving his sword above his head with one hand, he swung his hat in the other, and, with the voice of a merry schoolboy, cried cheerily: "Let's at them again, boys! Follow me, and we will lick them yet!"

A murmured hurrah, from a wounded corporal, was taken up by the flying hosts, and, swelling into one long, wild cheer for Shirley and the Union, reached the far limits of the fleeing legions, and struck consternation to the exulting foe. Shirley was on the field: it went along the shattered line like wildfire, and stayed the whirlwind of flight. Companies, regiments, and brigades reformed, as if by magic; and ardor, enthusiasm, and courage sprang out of the general chaos, and every man, armed with fresh ardor and determination, rushed to a renewal of the fight. They must retrieve their lost honor, and, as they had rushed from the enemy, they now rushed at them, resolved to die, but not to yield. General Shirley never cared for nice words, nor the punctilious turn of a sentence in the heat of battle, and his familiar exclamations of "Go in, boys! Give 'em plenty of lead! Sizzle it into 'em!" were received with yells of acclamation. The little general had set the ball rolling in the opposite direction, had turned the tide, and a solid body of invincible Northmen charged at the dismayed rebels with an impetus that was irresistible, and that dealt fearful havoc in their ranks.

The troops rallied to a man, closing up around their chief an impenetrable phalanx of bayonets, and with deafening huzzas bore down on the enemy. Again steel clashed against steel, and surging thousands compactly formed for

the terrible charge that should redeem their guns or stretch them dead on the blood-soaked earth.

The second division fought like enraged demons, and the rising sun looked down on the savagely contested field without a sign of wavering on either side. Hotter and fiercer grew the struggle, faster and faster the ground drank blood, and in the midst of it, enveloped in a cloud of smoke, rode Philip Shirley. A cannon-ball crashing through the head of an aide at his side, tumbled him to the earth, but the near proximity of the ugly missile had only stunned him. He was up and on his plunging horse in a second. A color-bearer went down, cut in twain by a chain-shot. Shirley caught the colors as he fell, shook out the gory folds of the silken banner, and, with the bright emblem of freedom fluttering above his dauntless head, fearlessly galloped along the staggering line. His valor alone could save the day; he knew it, and unflinchingly went where death was thickest.

"Charge!" he cried. "Charge! break them by an assault, and the field is ours!"

A screaming shell tore into the breast of his gallant charger; extricating himself from the dying animal, he leaped to his feet, fearful that the cry of "General Shirley is killed!" would be the signal of annihilation to his army.

"All right, boys. I am on the tumble this morning. The 'rebs' are throwing their compliments prettly lively over there. Go for the battery, boys, and I am with you!"

This was electrical. It seemed as if the heaps of dead were making a scramble for their rifles, and closing in with the living for one more charge. As the intrepid little general spoke, a young sergeant fell dead immediately before him, his hot blood spurting warm in his face, and sprinkling the burnished buttons of his coat. Phil coolly wiped it off with the back of his hand, stepped over the palpitating body, and vaulted into the saddle of a riderless horse

prancing in snorting terror near by. Rising in the stirrups, he clapped his hands and shouted inspiringly:

"Keep it up five minutes longer, and we are hunkie! Hurrah!"

The rebels were repulsed—routed, flying in all directions like frightened sheep. Cheer upon cheer broke along the Union columns, and was taken up by the dying lips scattered among the piles of slain. The animation had fled with the necessity from General Shirley's heavy features. There was a limit to human vitality and endurance, and he had reached the end of his; and without waiting for aid or staff, the hero of the greatest achievement of the war slowly rode toward the rear, with eyes moodily bent upon the ground, and the least elated of the thousands shouting behind him. The old habit of carrying his hat in his hand still clung to him, and looking at it, he muttered: "I must bear a charmed life, for my clothing is riddled like a sieve. Three bullet-holes in my hat, at any rate; but better there than in my brain, I suppose." His face was so begrimed with blood and smoke, mingled with dust and perspiration, that but for the short figure he was hardly recognizable. Until early dusk he was busy in giving orders and sending despatches, and when the pen had finished what the sword had commenced, he retired from the cracker-box that had served him as a table, and withdrew to a clump of trees, out of range of the noise incident to clearing a battle-field of its ghastly encumbrances, pitching tents, and getting supper. He spread his blanket on the grass beneath a huge live-oak, and, wrapped only in his cloak, General Shirley lay down to sleep—the tired head unpillowed, and the tired heart again given over to the old regret.

One by one the stars came, and while the chieftain lay there, fatigued and weary, his name was flashing over the wires to every city, town, and hamlet where the cause of the Union was loved. Philip had his meed of glory! But

did it satisfy? Ten thousand homes desolated, ten thousand widows, and twice ten thousand orphans weeping that he had been victorious. This it cost to make him great—to conquer for the nation—and he had neither wife nor child. Ah! who could estimate the blood, and tears, and suffering of that awful day? Philip thought of this, and out from the clouds appeared, like the mirage of the desert, a beautiful face. It was a star at first, twinkling at him through a rift of the leaves, but it gradually shaped into a resplendent girlish semblance, and hovered above him with wings that lost themselves in stars; a mantle of ether, soft and fleecy as an angel's raiment, floated from the half-defined shoulders; undulating waves of black hair clinging around the grand brow, and eyes softly brilliant in gentle triumph. Sailing higher, it circled nearer, and, poised in the middle of the heavens, just where he could meet the dark eyes, the beautiful vision folded its starry wings, and in a voice like the whispering of the south wind addressed him: "Now is the measure of your ambition full. Your name is immortal. Poets sing it; history records it. You have won the goal, and stand on the pinnacle of earthly greatness. A nation shouts high your valor; your praise is on every tongue. You have reached the summit of fame, but are you happy? This is the reverse of the picture mortals paint as glory." She pointed a shadowy hand toward the earth, and there, marching in ghastly ranks, were a regiment of bloody dead. Torn, mangled, and bleeding, the corpses of the near battle-field faced into line, a mutilated cohort of war's pallid victims. A mingling of wails and shrieks suddenly filled all the air, and in dresses of palls a multitude of women and children, wringing their hands and sobbing, fell at the feet of the mute brigade—wives, mothers, children, and sisters. Yet, of the many fathers, sons, husbands, and brothers in that ghastly

array, not one held out a pitying hand; not one uttered a loving word; not one answered to his name, though called in accents of anguish; and while they prayed and moaned in useless entreaty, the earth slowly opened, and all—men, women, and children—were buried together, without stone or monument to tell that they had lived. The spirit-star vanished, and Philip awoke from his dream, aroused by two men, who, unaware of his proximity, had stopped to rest, for the figure they carried on the stretcher was heavy, and they had borne it from the furthest outpost unaided. The figure on the stretcher lifted his head, and Philip saw a colonel's strap on the shoulder nearest to him, and heard a voice he knew say, faintly: "I have not long to live, but, while you are taking breath, and I am losing mine, let's hurrah for General Shirley. He is from Alden, and trumped the rebs right out of their trick most beautifully." Lawrence Parker made a brave effort to raise a cheer, but it failed in his throat, and he fell back, whispering: "I'd give half of the little life I've left to see the general once more." Shirley scrambled up, a phantom of his dream still clinging to him in the shape of Colonel Parker's young wife, who would be a widow on the morrow, and one of the sable-robed mourners of his vision, and, speaking to the foremost man as he came forward, asked: "Shall I bear a hand, my lads?"

"Are you a skulker?" demanded the wounded officer. "If you are, you can't help carry *me*."

"Not a bit of a skulk. I've done my part."

"General Shirley, I know your voice, though you are trying to disguise it. Don't take me farther; let me die here. I want to send a message to Mary. Poor wife, her baby is only a month old, and I have never seen it. I never shall see it. These fights are hardest on the women, general."

"Are you badly hurt, colonel?"

"Got it through the body. I don't mind for myself. It is my wife and child that worries me."

"I'll look out for Mary and the baby. Does that content you, Parker?"

The quiver in Philip's voice was only equalled by the sob in the dying officer's, who could scarcely muster strength to press the hand laid on his own.

"The world is slipping from me, and you are little Phil, playing by the roadside with the Lee girls. We are all changed, you more than all. God bless you, general; Mary—"

"You may bear him along now, boys, without care for his wounds."

General Shirley turned on his heel, and the two men went on with Colonel Parker, dead on the stretcher. He did not resume his slumbers, but set out to find the ever-faithful Murray, who would probably have a tent and supper ready by this time.

"Been searching everywhere for you," said the aide, accidentally encountering him where he least expected, tramping alone under the trees. "I've a tent rigged as comfortable as circumstances will allow, and a bottle of Colonel Dodge's prime sherry—poor fellow, he won't need any more—and the wing of a chicken, that you may find palatable if your fast has been as long as mine."

"So long that I can't remember when or where I swallowed my last hard-tack;" and, drawing up a stool, the general did ample justice to the catering colonel's viands. After his appetite had been satisfied, and he had given orders that he was not to be disturbed, the general spent an hour in writing to Mary Parker, Murray silently dozing on a camp-chest, and reflectively sipping sherry meanwhile. Carefully folding, sealing, and addressing it, he pushed it toward him. "Mail that to-morrow. Colonel Parker is dead."

"What!" Murray was amazed.

"Colonel Parker is dead, and a young wife and infant left, as all army officers' wives are, destitute. If women's hearts ever *do* break, this will come near breaking hers."

Phil rested his elbow on his knee, and his forehead in his hand, so long that sipping sherry became irksome to Murray, and he plaintively ventured to open on a different topic, and one very marvellous, to him at any rate.

"It beats all, general; here am I five years your senior, and only wear a silver leaf, and you with the prettiest pair of double stars in the service. Not that I have not been in some all-fired tight places that I had to fight my way out of; and that was a devil of a wound I got the last time. I thought it was a leg gone, sure; but I lack your dash and coolness. I never could get the hang of your manœuvring at close quarters. You have a laurel now, that old Time can't wither. After to-day your name will be known as far as civilization extends. By Jove, I envy you, general."

"And yet this is far from being a happy moment with me."

This was a great admission for Philip to make to a subordinate, or to any one. But they had been friends so long that Murray seemed entitled to some little confidence from his chief. Encouraged by his apparent listening attitude, the colonel continued in the same plaintive strain:

"Confounded lonesome thing to think of, for a man to fight and win, and have no wife nor child to share it; nothing in the world to give his honors to but his grim old self. And these tremendous tussels shake the youth out of a fellow so fast that we are old before we are done being young, or what would be young in other men."

Murray rubbed the rough, bearded cheek that had not felt a razor for a week, and looked at a hole in the canvas

beyond the general's head, as if he had lost something and it was hidden there.

"You are not particular in intimating that you have a skeleton in your closet, Murray, and although you keep it flimsily disguised, it is not difficult to guess its sex. Who was she, colonel?"

"Ah, well, you see, general, we all have our dreams, and at one time in my life I thought that to lay my modest bays at a certain woman's feet would repay me for all the hardships endured in the winning; but she would n't accept my life-labor, and so here I am, a rough old bachelor — the saddle my home, and the sword my only sweetheart. Singular that a little girl, slim and fair, and who once shyly acknowledged to loving me a little, should keep her memory tender in my heart all these years. Suppose we adopt Parker's baby, and name it after us?"

"It may be a girl, and possibly already named," dryly suggested the general.

Murray looked blank, and took a glass of sherry as an antidote to his short-sightedness. It warmed him to a further discourse of a personal character.

"Sometimes I say behanged to the old memory, and picture myself with a bonny wee wife and baby or two — I should not mind three, if there was a prospect of promotion, to give the matter importance and respectability. Are you ever troubled by such fancy-sketches?"

"No," said the general, emphatically. "I never devote my thoughts to visionary themes. My idols are all substantial and matter-of-fact."

Colonel Murray's private opinion of this, if truthfully translated, would have been: "If you ever told a lie, General Phil Shirley, you are telling a rouser now. For I'll bet my life there is a skeleton in your closet bigger than mine, and though better disguised, I can guess its

sex, and, if I dare, ask with you, who was she?" but he only said, commiseratingly:

"We never know what may happen, and we may stumble into matrimony yet."

"I shall never marry," said Shirley, decisively, and his eye fastened on a stain in the canvas-wall, as if he had lost something too, and that were the impress of its vanishing.

"I am sorry, and I am not; sorry that you should have no domestic altar, and not that your terrible temper might unguardedly wound to death a gentle wife—break her heart, general, and you never know it."

Philip turned on him sharply. "Do you intimate that I am not a gentleman, or that I could be cruel to a woman?"

"Don't mistake me. It just crossed my mind that if a wife should see your face with the savage war-look at its height, she might ever after fear to caress it, lest an unlucky word might cause it to gather there, and *she* the object."

"You make me out a fiend, and in my boyhood I was noted for my gentleness and forbearance with girls, and was the self-constituted defender of a score," he replied, less hotly.

"Halcyon days! I'd like to have known you then, gentle and forbearing, before this grim severity settled upon you. But, good night; it is past eleven, and I feel as if I could endure considerable rest without grumbling; and I have yet to find a place wherein to bunk." And bowing, the love-lorn colonel gracefully retired, leaving Philip to his reproachful self-communings.

"Ah, a woman did once see the demon in my face, and this hand, this very right hand, that to-day wrote out so grand a page of history, struck a woman to the earth—a woman who loved me, and whom I loved, God knows, with all my soul. She forgave me the blow, for she was sorry

for me then; but not the deeper wound I left upon her heart. What a fool I was to think that she could ever retard my progress or detract from my greatness! How utterly mean, selfish, and contemptible I must have appeared to her — and to make the discrepancy more hateful and distorted, to protest that I loved her, and have the assurance to tell her so, and at the same time renounce her! Now I see how splendidly she would have augmented my honors. Lifting her beautiful face from the background of my fame, as I saw it to-night among the clouds, she would be the crowning glory of my life; but here I am, morose and gray, when I ought to be young and light-hearted, caressing Imogene's children. Wifeless, childless, and alone; ah, quite alone! Hollow fame, how you mock me in the very hour of triumph!"

Philip's hand was wandering on his knee, as if it were fondling an infant's head, just about so high, with eyes like Gypsy's, and rosy lips, that were learning to say papa, and find the way to climb into his arms, with love the only teacher. Unsteady little feet seemed tottering at his knee, little fingers clinging to the strength of his. A little face just out of babyhood lay trustfully against the bronze of his; and it might have been a reality but for the pride of the past; only a dream, but it might have been real but for the false pride of the past. Oh, no, General Shirley was not visionary; his idols were all substantial and matter-of-fact; but, for all the brave assertion, he had spent an hour in building the largest and frailest kind of an air-castle; and, like all architects of these airy dwellings, had the mortification of seeing it tumble to pieces before it was fairly completed. What demolished Philip's was the sight of the letter addressed to Mary Parker, and a kindling of wrath that Colonel Murray had forgotten to take it. Such is the consistency of human nature.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE MYSTERY NO LONGER A MYSTERY.

AS may be supposed, the Marquis de la Vahl did not fail to pay his respects to Miss Colburn and Miss Vale at a very early day after the ball, and in a week he had made himself so agreeable that he was a privileged caller with the ladies, although yet distrusted by the *père*. In conversing about him, Imogene remarked:

"I like, and dislike him, if such a sentiment be possible."

And Olive said: "He is a widower, or divorced, or something of the kind, and in many respects I fear his morals are not commendable; but outwardly he is certainly the gentleman; and—goodness, that's his ring now, the old adage verified, and I leave him to you, for I am sure I would be one too many." And before Imogene could object, she had left the room.

The marquis looked at Imogene, and Imogene looked at the marquis, both at a loss what to say, and, for people of the world, behaving very awkward indeed.

Miss Vale said, "Good evening," and motioned him to a seat.

The marquis said, "Good evening," and accepted the seat; and then both looked at the carpet in a foolish, meaningless fashion, that was positively ridiculous in such society-schooled creatures as the marquis and Imogene. The Frenchman was the first to rally, and that, too, in words that would have shocked any one but Miss Vale.

"Imogene, I love you."

"And I love *you*," she replied, composedly. He had been longing to tell her this; but her calm echo of his feelings somehow jarred his finer sensibilities, and he

wished she had not been so quick to reciprocate, for he did not intend to make an offer of his hand along with his confessed love; neither was there a base thought in his mind toward her. He could not restrain the hasty words, and bit his lips in vexation that they had escaped. Looking steadily at him—no blush, no agitation, no hesitation—she repeated: "I love you; but it is as I would love one who has injured me. In one sense I love you, in another I do not; and you can make what you like out of the strange contradiction."

"I have experienced some such feeling myself, and I could not, although I hold you most dear, make you my wife."

"Your wife! I never thought of such a thing. Good heavens! I could die, but marry *you*—never! Don't I see the errors of a misspent life plainly written on your face? Don't I see fashionable dissipation in your manner, and man-of-the-world visible in your every act?"

The look of absolute horror that accompanied the words convinced him that she read his character clearly. He did not wish her to think worse of him than he really was, and said, deprecatingly:

"You are estimating me too low. I have never overstepped a certain bound, nor fatally injured but *one* life. I have found the majority of your sex clever, wicked, and intriguing, with no sensitiveness to shock, no principles to overcome, and no heart to mar—the better, purer minority I have left to their goodness and purity. I never was a serpent to coil in the nest of a dove. The world gives me credit for more sins than I am guilty of, and I fear you have imbibed more of its opinion than I shall ever be able to eradicate. To prove how highly I esteem your friendship, I will tell you all my past some day, and leave you to judge of my transgressions, and, I hope, forgive them. Will you give me confidence for confidence, Imogene?"

She flushed a little, and shook her head.

"I see you have a secret. We all have. Mine is encrusted beneath many frivolities, but I could bare my soul to you, and that, to another, I have never done. We understand each other for the future, and if Miss Colburn and yourself will honor me so far as to accompany me to the Chantilly races to-morrow, my carriage is at your disposal. Royalty will be there, and altogether a grand affair."

Imogene accepted for herself and Olive, and, bowing his adieus, the well-pleased marquis took his leave. In the hall he met Lot Colburn, and he did not like the expression of that statesman's eye when it lit upon him sternly, nor the tone of his voice when he said:

"Miss Vale is under my protection, and understand, sir, I'll have no trifling in that quarter."

The marquis ruffled his plumes in an instant.

"Please understand, sir, in return for your courteous insinuations, that, of all women in the world, I esteem Miss Vale the most."

"And that is no great compliment, if public opinion be true."

"Sir!"

"Nonsense! I am a plain-spoken American, and know nothing of the code of honor as relating to swords and pistols. Your amours are such as I discountenance, and no gentleman should be proud of."

"I cannot resent what in another I should deem an insult and punish as such, for I am glad in my heart that you guard this girl so carefully. And I give you my most sacred word, sir, that my breast harbors not one unholy thought in connection with her. Do you believe me?"

The marquis was in earnest, if ever a man was, and the astute Lot knew it.

"Yes; and if I misjudged you, I beg your pardon."

They shook hands, and the Marquis de la Vahl went up

several degrees in Mr. Lot Colburn's good opinion, and it is only fair to say that the North American politician took several strides in the better estimation of the Marquis de la Vahl.

At the appointed hour on the following day the superb equipage of the marquis drew up before the Honorable Lot's door, and soon after the ladies of his family were being handed in by the noble marquis. Olive was in advance and already seated; when, glancing back, she was frightened by seeing the deathly pale face of Imogene drop helplessly to the nobleman's supporting shoulder.

"I—I am a little faint," she whispered, staring like one in a nightmare.

Her faltering feet wavered on the carriage-step, and but for the marquis she would have fallen. He lifted her in his arms as tenderly as if she were an infant, and placed her beside Olive on the velvet-cushioned seat, without a word; but the deep solicitude of his fine eyes told Olive that he was capable of much genuine gentleness and good feeling, in spite of the accumulated rubbish that various immoralities had left upon his versatile nature.

"I am better now. You may drive on," said Imogene, trying to force a smile, and the carriage whirled away.

What had caused this sudden and excessive emotion neither Olive nor the marquis could tell, but it was a very simple cause. Merely the richly emblazoned crest on the Marquis de la Vahl's carriage-door—a green serpent, emblematical of eternity, coiling around a crimson heart.

Imogene never knew much about that ride, or whether royalty graced the Bois or not; but when they arrived at home she whispered to the marquis, while assisting her to alight, "Come and see me this evening;" and, not stopping for Olive's slower steps, ran up to her room in a fever of suppressed joy, delight, and triumph.

"Imbecile, not to have guessed it before! Now, Aunt

Ruth, I am coming, I am coming *home* to you! O heart, you have patiently borne sorrow, do not burst with joy! O mother, mother, he is full of sins, but he never did thee that *one* great wrong! He broke your heart, but he broke it *honorably*. He dug you a sad, but not a shameful grave; and that he was *so* merciful, I'll love and forgive him in your name, for you loved and forgave him unto death!"

Elinor's wedding-ring slipped on her daughter's third finger in pride, that she was no longer nameless, and her mother no longer a theme to doubt. The fading daylight brought the marquis, and Imogene went to meet him with a gladness that came near betraying her before the time.

The marquis rose to greet her as cordially as if he had not seen her for a month.

"You promised to tell me something of your life, and I have taken a fancy to hear the story to-night. Will you gratify me?"

"Will you tell me the cause of your emotion to-day?"

"Yes, afterward."

"It is not a pleasant subject, but I will keep my word, if you will have patience to listen."

"You may be sure I will be patient;" and without more urging or preface, the marquis launched into his personal and private history, sparing neither himself nor others in its concise narrating.

"Twenty-eight years ago I married a sweet, amiable girl of eighteen, simply and solely because I loved her; but, notwithstanding, some called it a *mésalliance*, and in many respects it was, for I was wild and fond of pleasure; she saintly in nature and strongly averse to the ceaseless rounds of splendid gayeties to which I was devotedly attached, and which from boyhood I had freely participated in without stint or restraint. I was only twenty-three, but I had sown a pretty extensive crop of wild oats in that time, and

at my marriage the supply was by no means exhausted, which my wife was not slow to find out and deplore. She protested, and I persisted, and of course trouble commenced. She worshipped me, and, like other men better by far than I ever pretended to be, I presumed upon it, although I loved her dearly in my gay, heedless way, as I have never loved a woman before or since."

"And was she fair or dark?" questioned Imogene, in breathless interest.

"She was fair as a snowdrop — a fair, gray-eyed English girl, that I accidentally met in my travels here in France, fell in love with, and married in two months. She was well-born and well educated; a graceful, modestly-mannered, good woman; too good for me, for I did not know how to appreciate or breathe her purer atmosphere. She possessed nothing in the point of wealth. There was a magnificent estate somewhere in the South of England, but it was entailed on the male heirs, and, according to that barbarous English law, left my wife penniless; but I did not care for that — my revenues were princely, and English pounds nothing to me. I made her a marchioness, and lavished on her all the splendor and luxury that wealth can command; but I did not relinquish my past, dashing life, nor leave off the thousand follies that I knew were abhorrent to her. Things continued in this state till the birth of her child — a girl; it was a black-eyed, dark little elf, the image of myself. I never saw it but once. It was only a month old, and she laid the little thing in my arms one day, with a prayer in her eyes that I would be better for its innocent sake; but I did not heed it; I merely kissed the elfin sprite, and tossed it back to her with the laughing remark, 'That now she'd a baby like me, she ought to be content, and when a beauty and a belle, such as she promised to be, I'd be glad to see her again' — and — and I have never seen either of them since. Both mother and child disappeared,

and, seared as I am, I have never recovered from the loss."

"I have no doubt you drove the young mother to this last desperate step by the graceless conduct you treat so lightly," said Imogene, coldly.

"I know it; but she suspected me where I was not guilty. She had the best of me, and, if she had been more patient and less hasty and distrustful, might have reclaimed me, and saved herself untold suffering. As God sees me, I never was unfaithful to her, even in thought; but she heard of my bachelor amours, and the idea grew upon her that I was untrue, and had never loved her. This, to a woman of her single-heartedness, and loving, confiding temperament, was the bitterness of death. In vain I protested my innocence, and disclaimed everything like infidelity. The pernicious doubt had taken complete possession of her mind, and was not to be eradicated. She had been religiously brought up, and the recklessness of my unmarried career naturally made her distrust my married devotion. Smarting under her unjust suspicions, I became wilder than ever. Cards and wine never tempted me, but the turf, and the innumerable allurements of the dazzling circle in which I moved did, and I gave myself up to their fascination, with redoubled zest. She did not complain beyond a mild semblance of persuasion, that was too gentle for a rebuke, and too loving for censure; but she was so evidently unhappy, that her sad face was a continual reproach, that I took to avoiding out of sheer self-upbraiding. In this dangerous state of mind I unfortunately joined a party of convivial friends about to make the tour of Switzerland. I intended to return in a month, but one pleasure after another detained me, and I grew careless about writing — cruelly neglectful, you would say — but the truth is, I did not know what to write. She did not think as I did, and what pleased her bored me, so I made my let-

ters brief, and seldom as possible. At last we decided to ascend the Alps. I wrote her my decision, and that, in consequence, she need not expect to hear from me for some weeks. In the mean time a cousin of mine, by the same name, Count de Vahl, a gay, jovial scamp, too, whose sins I have often been compelled to shoulder, set out for America. She jumped to the rash conclusion, through confounding the names, that I had deceived and deserted her, and came to believe the very worst of me. I may be guilty of follies, but not of crime; and if she had known me better she would not have been so quick to condemn. Laboring under this most unhappy mistake, she set out for the United States in search of me, without informing any one of her purpose. On landing in New York she followed the track of my cousin to Pittsburg, and there discovered her error. She was too proud to return, and, broken-hearted, wandered into Ohio. I have travelled all through that section of the country since I came to know her fate; but although I searched and advertised, I could discover no trace of my lost wife. I can account for it in no other way than that she concealed her name, and in dying made no sign of who she was. She found a home in a respectable Western family, and there lived out her days, far away from home and kindred that were hers by right."

"And how did you obtain this knowledge?"

"A little before she died she sent the date of her marriage, with that of the birth of her child, to her sister, begging her, should the necessity ever arise, to care for her daughter. There was a long account of the place and family in which she lived, but all names were carefully omitted; and that is strange, when she asked her sister to care for the child, which, without a clue to its identity or its whereabouts, was utterly impossible."

"Perhaps when the letter was written she meditated imparting such of her history as related to the future welfare

of her daughter to the kind lady with whom she resided, and through whom the child could be restored to its friends," softly suggested Imogene.

"I presume so, for there was a postscript of two lines only, but which might mean a great deal more than is apparent. 'I leave the child in good hands, and *she* will know how to act for her when I am gone.' I think those are the exact words."

"And she might have died sooner, or more sudden than she expected — it takes so long to die of a wounded heart — and left this good woman unable to act."

The marquis sighed. "It is all supposition beyond the fact that she died and left the child alone. It was like her to be shy and chary of her confidence, and she had a sort of still, meek pride that is the hardest in the world to break down. She has crept off by herself and quietly endured. Ten years ago the sister died of consumption. It runs in the family; and, knowing her recovery hopeless, she sent the papers to me. She had a clearer idea of my nature, and believed that the father would be the proper person to look after the child, and, although it took her many years to reach this conclusion, it was the only right one; hence my journey to the United States with the faint hope of finding her, the mere postmark, Ohio, my only guide. She intimates in her letter, or rather journal, that she would prefer her daughter to grow up under the roof where she had found rest and peace than be exposed to the dark whirlpools that had engulfed her. Oh, well, regrets are useless; you have the sad story, and I have not screened myself; and now you know why I shall never care for what men call real love again. I am careless, cynical, and skeptical, but not depraved; and virtue has no enemy in me."

"I recognize something of your nature in my own, and it makes me loving and forgiving toward you, and this young wife's name was — what? You have not told me."

"Elinor." Imogene laid her hand on his.

"Great God!" he cried, staring aghast at the sparkling ring; "where did you get that? Who are you?"

"I am Elinor's child."

"My daughter! Oh, now my love has found its level, and I may take you in my arms, dear, dear child of Elinor, with all my soul's great sacred love."

"Father! It is a name foreign to my tongue, but I come to your bosom as my natural refuge, trusting the love that will meet me there." She threw herself on his breast, and the dissolute father and beautiful, noble-natured daughter were united in undying filial and paternal love. The marquis was blessed with one pure and perfect affection, and it touched the one pure and perfect fount that a hundred vices had left untainted in his heart.

Olive entered, and was astounded to see her companion, the very pink of decorum, hugging and being hugged by the handsome marquis, in the most fervent and mutual manner possible.

"Don't be scandalized, dear Olive," said Imogene, radiantly, "this is my father, and the weary search is ended."

"Your father!" Olive could not believe her ears.

"Yes," spoke up the marquis, "and, henceforth, my daughter is one of the first ladies of France." The ruling spirit was strong, even in the moment of his new-found joy, and that she was a daughter to be proud of was no less a blessing than that she was his daughter. Of course, Olive kissed Imogene, and shook hands with the marquis, and repented of all the evil things she had ever thought of him. At the height of these congratulations Lot Colburn came in, and, after a hasty explanation, heartily added his, and received the voluminous thanks of the marquis for the care and affection he had bestowed on his child.

Mr. Colburn, in staid, modestly-put protests, replied

that he owed him no thanks, for Imogene had been an angel to *his* child when she was lame and feeble; and so the French *père* and the American *père* shook hands again, and, in the excess of his gratitude, the former would have kissed him, only Lot was too much of a Yankee, and did n't know how to gracefully salute a French moustache; but Olive and Imogene flew to kissing each other behind the backs of their respected *pères* with the most enthusiastic feminine *empressement.*

When the happy confusion had somewhat subsided, Imogene said, earnestly: "The first steamer that sails takes me back to Aunt Ruth. I promised her; and you will want to see my mother's grave." She turned to her father at the last, and he kissed her for answer.

"I presume you consider yourself the proudest and happiest man in the universe; but just now I am rather proud and happy myself," said Lot to the marquis proper, but to everybody generally. "The Legislature of my native State has seen fit to propose my name for senatorial honors, and letters this moment received inform me that my nomnation only awaits my acceptance, and begging, in case I consent, to return at once; and as I have accepted, it is imperative that I leave immediately for home. I am getting such a buxom daughter that a pretext of her ill health will hardly be sufficient to detain me in Paris; and more than all, there is a bright prospect of peace greeting us on the other shore. Atlanta has surrendered; there ended the march to the sea. Shirley has swept the Shenandoah, and the fall of Richmond is every day imminent. Will you be ready to cross the channel by Thursday?"

Imogene said she would be ready in an hour, and Olive, a little less sanguine, thought that two days was the least she could promise.

A week later, and our Paris party were comfortably installed on board the splendid steamer Italy, and fairly

homeward bound. On the morning of the third of April, 1865, the Italy rounded her New York pier, and from her deck the hundreds of passengers congregated along the guards saw the forest of shipping decorated from mast to yards with bunting, flags, and streamers of every conceivable size, and, floating from steeples, warehouses, public buildings, and private dwellings, waved the gay, old, starry flag of the free. The whole city was in jubilee-dress and spirits, colors high in the breeze, cannon firing, bells ringing, and men cheering everywhere. A vociferating newsboy, with an emblem of peace fluttering in the rear, was yelling at the top of his voice, on the wharf: "Evacuation of Richmond," "New York Tribune, third edition!" "E-vacuation of Rich-mond!" and in less than a second every male passenger was up to his eyes in a Tribune. It was glorious news to Lot Colburn, and he felt like pinning a penny flag to his beaver, and crying hurrah with the best of them. Olive thought she would like to turn into a Goddess of Liberty for a short time, and sport a dress of stars and stripes and a cap of laurel-leaves. Imogene fancied she could almost whistle Yankee-doodle, or do something else equally *outre;* and the marquis shrugged his non-appreciating French shoulders, for he was tired of the sea, and longing for a shore breakfast and a glass of prime claret, neither of which could be obtained among the rag-tailed, heterogeneous, stereotyped crowd of a foreign steamship wharf, and which scaly crowd, as every traveller knows, are exactly alike all over the known world. "*Allez vous en,*" sternly ordered the marquis to an officious hack-driver, who was energetically importuning him to accept a seat in his shabby old vehicle. Then grasping his daughter's arm, and leaving the baggage to the valet, he said, "*Allons!* this vile, fish-smelling mob is worse than bilge-water and sea-sickness combined;" and under his vigorous marshalling they were soon driving toward the time-honored old Astor.

Mr. Colburn had important business to transact in Washington, and they decided to visit the capital for a few weeks before going to Alden by the Pittsburg route.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S LAST RECEPTION.

"YOU have queened it in Europe, but for our democratic President's reception to-night you are more queenly than ever, and you are robed like an empress," cried Olive, on beholding Imogene arrayed for her first Washington reception. Her toilet was indeed superb — a magnificent white velvet, trimmed with white lace and scarlet satin ruchings. The ancestral diamonds of her house — gems of fabulous value — sparkling on neck, arms, and brow; the heart-and-serpent crest blazing in the tiara binding the black ringlets away from the noble forehead, were literal rays of light, and the lace and flowers rising and falling on her bosom were studded with costly jewels; and she said to the heart beating beneath the lace, and flowers, and jewels:

"I mean to shine to-night; for one will be there to whom I want to look my rank, and show him it is as high as the heavens above his plebeian birth."

They were driven to the White House in the carriage of the French minister, who was a distant relative of the marquis. The most distinguished people in the land were there, and there, receiving the people, stood Abraham Lincoln, sad of brow and grave of eye, the greatest, noblest, truest heart and mind beneath the sun. The seal of martyrdom was even then on his sorrowful face, and the homely features, now so dear to us all, were almost within the shadow. Imogene had touched the hand of emperors,

dukes, and princes, but none were like the clasp of the good President—no look so benign as that of his sad eyes. She thought of it when the President's hand was cold, and the assassin's bullet lay above the kind eyes, buried in the grand brain—that in stilling the great, anxious, long-troubled heart, had "found the tired spot."

Standing in the shade of the heavy curtains of the East Room, where the view was toward the Potomac, and the crowd promenading from parlor to parlor in a ceaseless tide did not infringe on their retirement, two gentlemen were conversing in a low tone, the one in a handsome court-dress, and the other in a full major-general's uniform. It was Sir Frederick Bruce speaking, his companion listening in polite but abstracted attention.

"You must not fail to make the acquaintance of the Marquis de la Vahl and his incomparable daughter. Old bachelors like you and I have a right to admire, if we don't care to possess. After seeing her, you will say with me that there is but one woman in the world. Ah! there they come with the Colburn party. I must pay my respects."

"Gypsy!" The half-inaudible exclamation fell from General Shirley's lips, before he could command the sudden surprise of seeing her again, and that too under such completely reversed circumstances. Sir Frederic heard it.

"What, sir?" The general answered the diplomatist's question by a command. "Stay. I used to know the Colburns. How came they in the train of this marquis and his daughter?"

"Oh, there is a romance connected with it. I had the story from one of the legation yesterday. And they came in the suite of the French embassy this evening. A sad *éloignement* of some kind occurred between the marquis and his wife—he is not a saint in morals—when this beautiful and only child was a mere infant; and

broken-hearted, or disgusted, as it may be, she fled from France with her babe, came to America, and buried herself from all who knew her in a little out-of-the-way Ohio village, and there meekly died, leaving the child to be brought up by the kind family who had befriended the mother, and all traces of her concealed from the father, who, so goes the story, ransacked the State from boundary to centre in search of her. When Mr. Colburn went abroad some years ago, Imogene Vale, as she was then known, was employed to accompany his daughter, at the time a great invalid, as a companion. By aid of a curious relic, left to her by her mother, she happened to discover a father in the noble marquis yonder, who proudly, and immediately acknowledged himself as such; hence her present lofty position. She comes of a pure patrician stock. There is Bourbon blood in her veins, and no doubt the marquis intends to mate her with little less than royalty. That is the *dénoûment* of the romance. Will you be presented?"

"No, I am not over-anxious. The noble marquis may not care to meet a rough-and-ready Yankee general of my type. Possibly I may do my *devoirs* later in the evening," said Shirley, his face and manner impenetrable.

Sir Frederick departed; and from his curtained nook Philip had the pleasure of seeing him place Imogene's hand on his arm, and cavalierly lead her from the room.

Sir Frederick Bruce was a gentleman, and his friend; but Philip Shirley did not feel exactly right toward him after that, and inwardly cursed the knightly courtier for his exceeding admiration of Imogene Vahl. Her prediction had been verified. She was above him — beautiful, elegant, and accomplished — heiress to a fortune a princess might envy, and the only child of a titled father.

Philip turned his back to the gay groups sauntering hither and thither adown the East Room, and wished it was not so — that she, as Gypsy, was a girl again, and he

with a life to live over. And while he knit his brows and wished, Imogene and Sir Frederick were passing through the Blue Room and the Red Room to the private Presidential parlor, where a select company about the open grand-piano were awaiting her: Imogene's fame had preceded her, and she sat down before the instrument amid a hush of voices. The rustle of silks and flutter of fans grew silent, and everybody was on the tiptoe of expectation. It would certainly be something out of the common in the way of music, and the music-loving and music proficients were breathless. But what was their amazement, after a few slow notes, to hear the sweet, flexible, perfectly cultivated voice begin to sing the simple, touching hymn, so dear a favorite of Mr. Lincoln: "Oh, why should the spirit of mortals be proud?" She knew the truthful simplicity of the Chief Magistrate listening at her side, and of them all she was singing alone for him. The grave, sad face of the President looked down upon her its mute, heartfelt thanks, the solemn, dark eyes misty, and the tall, gaunt frame trembling. The great soul in that angular body responded to the sentiment of the simple hymn as only the soul of such a man could, and Imogene felt that she was near the best and humblest ruler that ever held the supreme power of a nation or sat on the utmost height of earthly greatness. The hymn dropped into fainter melody, and voice and instrument were still. By common consent no one stirred or spoke; fashion and folly, mirth and joy were mute. Mr. Lincoln shaded his brow with the large, strong hand that had scattered so many blessings, and now so near gathering the harvest in heaven that it had sown on earth, and for several minutes not a sound was audible in that vast assembly. Beating hearts and ticking watches alone told that humanity was present. The President was the first to move, and went off in a corner by himself, apparently to speak with Mr. Seward, the gray premier,

at the other end of the room, but in reality to clear his vision.

Imogene was induced to try her power again, and, after a moment of thoughtful hesitation, and a faint, doubtful prelude, a flood of exquisite melody poured from the vibrating instrument, a wild, triumphant jubilee that tingled to the fingers' ends of the applauding audience, and dispelled the gloom of its predecessor.

"May I ask the name of this piece — it is new to me," said Sir Frederick.

"I call it 'Peace,' and there is no *jeu de mot* intended," said Imogene, archly.

And Olive took occasion to whisper aside to him: "It is her own composition, improvised on the whim of the moment, and you have heard its birth and death at one and the same time."

When the victorious anthem was ended, Imogene looked up to find standing at the elbow of the English Ambassador Philip Shirley, intently gazing at her, as if he would read her soul, and know just how he was held there. The heart in her bosom stood still, but not a sign of its treachery paled her face, although a little color stole from her lips. She was aware that he made one of the changing throng surging through the spacious rooms, and when they met face to face she was mistress of her self-control.

"Your arm, Sir Frederick."

He offered it with alacrity. She smiled, and looked brightly back at Olive, on purpose that her gaze might cross his, and so prove to him that she was not afraid to meet his eye. Olive, innocent of the artifice, gave it little heed, however, for she had just discovered Philip, and, holding out both hands, came to meet him.

"Philip — General Shirley — I am so glad to see you!"

"Olive — Miss Colburn — is it possible! How changed!"

"You miss the crutches; I left them in Europe — I trust,

forever. There is no excuse for being petted and humored now. But how I am running on! I quite overlook the fact that you are a famous general."

"And I hope you always will. Take my arm; perhaps we may find a secluded nook where we can talk of old times undisturbed by this Babel."

The secluded nook having been found and appropriated, Olive said: "We have been abroad a long while, and I am almost a stranger at Alden; but is it not more of to-day than yesterday you would know of, Philip?"

"I knew the past would bring up the present," he smiled.

"Wise Philip! Well, the mystery is out now, so I suppose I am at liberty to speak. Imogene has been with us, and such a noble woman as she is! She swore me to secrecy on the matter of leaving home before we were a day at sea, and, as papa was somewhat in her confidence, I did not object. And she was the idol of the French court before inheriting the prestige of her father's name. In his youth the marquis was a bit wild, they say, but he is devotedly attached to Imogene, and loved her without dreaming that she was his daughter."

"And is she still unmarried? Pardon the curiosity, but you know she used to be a favorite of mine when she was in high aprons."

"Married, no, nor even engaged; and that is the strangest to me. Please consider what I say *sub rosa*. It is for the sake of those days when she was a pet of yours in bibs that I impart the confidence. To be candid, I do not think Imogene has much conjugal love in her composition. That is, I don't think she is quite capable of concentrating her entire affections on one being."

"I presume not," said Philip, dryly. "Your perfectly beautiful women never are."

"If I did not hate an argument above all things, I

might be tempted to maintain the contrary; but we were speaking of Imogene. Now, in Paris she had lords and dukes in plenty sighing at her feet. She had only to speak and she was a duchess or a marchioness; but the very first look or hint of love from these lordly suitors banished them. And now, General Shirley, if you are at all skilled in the heart's diplomacy, tell me, why and how is this?"

Philip was carefully examining his sword-hilt, but his mind was not so much absorbed in the scrutiny that he did not guess the motive little Olive had in bewailing Imogene's lack of conjugal affinity.

"I am sure I have not the honor of being the keeper of Miss Vahl's affections. Perhaps she prefers the admiration of many to the devotion of one."

"Now, Philip, that is downright slander. There is not one atom of the coquette in her nature. She was a girl — a young country-bred child, as you may say — when I first saw her; but, even then, she had the speech and manner of a woman who had tasted more than an ordinary share of a woman's trouble; and, judging of her life since, she will, like myself, die an old maid. Ah, how old we are getting, Philip! and only a little while ago you and she were playing among the buttercups and daisies away there in the West."

Philip was playing with the fringe of his sash, and a long in-drawn breath was the answer.

After a pause, Olive asked archly: "And are *you* still unmarried?"

"Still companionless, and likely to remain so. I am such a preposterous object, and unprepossessing fellow generally, that I doubt few ladies could be found willing to accept me."

"Nonsense, Philip; you might take your pick of the fairest in the land."

"Oh, yes; I know thousands of the best would eagerly marry *General* Shirley; but who will marry *me?*"

"True," said Olive, unflatteringly; "but we are not all sordid creatures, and you may yet win a wife who will forget, in her love for Philip, the brilliant general; and, furthermore, a woman's pride in an object lies very near her love. That is a woman's logic, and you are welcome to the hint."

Philip mused a moment, still fingering the silken fringe.

"There is a gentleman here you ought to know, Olive — a good brave fellow as ever lived, and true as steel — Colonel Murray, of my staff. I have known him for years."

"Oh, I remember the name, and read of his being severely wounded in the same paper that falsely told us you were mortally in the same deplorable fix; and, by the way, you should have seen Imogene that time. She tore the paper to fragments, and in a fury pronounced it a detestable falsehood, as it turned out to be."

"Do you think my death would have caused her a pang?" he asked, more eagerly than he was aware. Olive did not fail to make the most of his anxiety.

"I think it would have broken her heart, or that part of it which is not already broken. Now make the most of that, and introduce me to your good, brave colonel. He will relieve you of me, which will give you an opportunity to renew your acquaintance with Imogene. I know nothing, but by putting two and two together, I am able to guess a good deal. There, don't say I am not your friend hereafter, and see that you profit by my friendship," laughed Olive; and they went over to where Colonel Murray was standing disconsolate and alone. "Colonel Murray, this is Miss Olive Colburn, a dear old friend of mine, who took pity on your loneliness, and comes as a comfort and a solace. I leave her to your care, and mind that you obey orders." And in a wonderful rebound of spirits Phi-

lip disappeared in the throng, feeling grateful toward Olive, and not so murderous toward Sir Frederick.

As for Colonel Murray, he never felt himself so tall and awkward in his life. Neither his hands nor his feet would keep still, and his voluble tongue did not know what to say. And little Olive, insomuch as he was good and brave, and true as steel, gave him the full benefit of her kind gray eyes, that might have confused him still more, only that she at the same moment laid her hand assuringly on his arm, and proposed a turn down the East Room. Twice the length of the long apartment considerably revived his sinking soul. He was getting used to the eyes, and the voice, and the hand, and rather liked it; and would have tramped all night if Olive had not suggested that a seat in the curtained embrasure of the window near by would be acceptable.

"And so you are an old friend of the general's?" said Murray, trusting to instinct to say the right thing.

"Yes," she laughed; "and expect you to give a full and valid account of him since the years you have known him better than I. It seems to me, who knew him in franker days, that he has grown sombrous and cynical."

"We of his personal staff stand somewhat in awe of his temper, and never provoke a rage or a reprimand by asking questions; and although I have known him so long, his nature is locked to me as to the rest of the world," cautiously replied the well-disciplined colonel.

"On guard, I see. Was my question rude?" said Olive, contritely.

"Oh, no. But the fact is, the general is pretty much of a thunder-cloud, but he occasionally favors me with a glimpse of blue sky, and I would not like to say anything that might be prejudicial to his really rare and noble nature. He is not communicative, and has his faults and failings, but they are second to the many good qualities of

his heart. But this is treason, and he will have me court-martialed for so freely ventilating his private character in the field."

Olive commended his devotion, and together they went in search of the marquis and his daughter.

Through the kindness of Sir Frederick, Philip was presented to the marquis, who cordially offered his hand, and in turn said: "My daughter, General Shirley."

Imogene coldly gave him the tips of her gloved fingers, and a cool look that very near approached a stare. It froze him instantly, and his face was as cold as her touch.

"I believe I have met General Shirley before, but it had nearly escaped my recollection. Life crowds faces out of one's memory so fast," she said lightly, and swept on with her father; and with her frigid look and cutting words rankling deep, Philip left the room also.

"How foolish!" thought Olive. "Constrained, and overdone. They crossed swords like icebergs. She is as cold as a polar sea, and he — well, none are so blind as those who will not see, and, although I am no poet, I have made a rhyme. She deserves a scolding, and I am just in the frame of mind to do it."

Catching her alone, she said: "I am surprised at your treatment of General Shirley. As a distinguished soldier of the country he has done so much to save, he certainly merits ordinary respect and deference to his great fame, that even you, Imogene, ought not to refuse."

"Pray, spare me, Olive, I never was a hero-worshipper. These military lions are so suggestive of powder, and they get so hardened. Everything is uniform here to-night. Everybody is a major-general. I have been presented to a score, and they all have that death-defying look that I so dislike in Philip Shirley."

"Oh, Imogene, how you are masking! Don't think to deceive me. He was ready to be amiable, but a man of

any sort of spirit must have congealed under your pointed sarcasm."

"Never mind his congealing. There he is, in the doorway of the Green Room. Go and console him. There is another old friend of mine here to-night, whose nature and profession I admire more—Thaddeus Ruggles, the recently elected Oregon senator. His delving has brought, indeed, a rich reward, and there are no blood-stains on his fame. He is coming this way. He is my beau-ideal of what a man should be. You will be glad to meet Mr. Ruggles." She knew Philip was watching her, and took great pains to be extremely cordial to the reserved senator.

"This is Miss Olive Colburn, the lady I have been abroad with, Thaddeus. I may call you by the old familiar Thad, I presume, and not transgress set conventionalities, for we were brought up brother and sister."

Honest old Thad had too little insight into female character to divine that he was being thus warmly noticed for the sole purpose of annoying Philip. The newly fledged senator was a babe to such chicanery, and expressed his thanks for her warm memory of one whom, in those pathetically referred to brother-and-sister-days, had certainly never appreciated or been appreciated as kindly as now.

"Have you met General Shirley yet?"

"No; but I am told he is here. I have have not seen him for years—not since that great episode in Davie's life, the party—and would scarcely know him."

"There he is, making his adieus to the President. The tall officer to the left is General Sherman." And while Thaddeus was looking in the direction indicated, Olive maliciously whispered: "You are overdoing the thing, and Philip is laughing at you."

Imogene glanced after the senator's eyes, and saw Philip biting his lips to hide a genuine laugh. He caught the quickly averted look of chagrin, returned it by a half kind,

half triumphant smile, that she might construe, as the inclination suited, into careless indifference, or a first advance toward a final reconciliation, and, turning on his heel, left the White House.

"When do you go to Alden?" said Thaddeus.

"Soon."

The answer was so coldly laconic that Mr. Ruggles was surprised, but Imogene did not mean to be either cold or laconic. She was thinking of something else, and vexed that Philip should smile in that provoking, self-confident way, just because she was familiar with Thaddeus, and showed that she was glad to see him. "Oh, you spoke about Alden. Yes, I am going when the spring is a little more advanced."

"And so am I. I am going home to marry Davie."

"Oh, Thaddeus!" Imogene glanced at the grave face with new interest. It was forty years old, but, with all the toil and study, it looked younger than Philip's. It was grave, but had none of his severity. It was manly and bearded, but it had none of his hardness and bronze, and she could remember when Philip's was the gentler and the tenderest. Somehow the comparison pained her. What right had Time to wrinkle the brow of the soldier and leave the brow of the older lawyer smooth and white? And the auburn locks—they were thick and burnished and youthful. The auburn brown eyes, steady and thoughtful, mirrored no soul-burden. He had labored to obtain distinction, and was envious of fame in a different way than Philip. His ambition was of a different type, and in heart and intellect he had travelled another road to get it. He had plodded and read and studied until his life-chart was fairly traced. He had quietly walked into fame's temple, and taken a seat without noise or crowding, and at forty was going home to marry Davie. Philip had dashed to greatness, took it by storm, and held the dazzling trophy

to the world that men might see what one master-mind could accomplish; but in his heart he threw the glory down, and bitterly cried, "The thing is not worth the sacrifice." Thaddeus had won to enjoy, Philip to abrogate. "Going home to marry Davie." The words kept recurring to Imogene long after she had left the brilliant assemblage that graced President Lincoln's last private levee.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

SHIRLEY VENTURES ON A FORLORN HOPE, AND MURRAY SEEKS A DOMESTIC ALTAR.

THE solemn obsequies of the martyred President were over. In universal grief and deepest emblems of mourning, the nation had laid away its murdered chief. Illinois received back her great, good son. Springfield sepulchred "Honest Abe," honest as when she sent him forth, and all that was left of Mr. Lincoln was history.

And since the now memorable levee, Imogene had not met Philip. The recollection of his triumphant smile still rankled, and she longed for a sight of Ruth and Davie, and, in making her preparations for the journey, had said to the marquis, "Follow me in a week, papa, but I want to go back, as I departed, alone." To this the marquis could but agree, and the evening before her departure she sat reading alone in their private parlor at Willard's, when a servant entered and announced "General Shirley; will you see him?" The skilful officer, having some knowledge of Miss Imogene's obduracy, did not leave the matter of seeing him or not seeing him optional, for he was close at the heels of the servant, and not stopping to note the

amazement of that obsequious worthy, he immediately entered the room; and the servant, considering the question of his mistress being at home settled, submissively withdrew.

It was a perilous moment. Imogene summoned a most chilling demeanor, and, rising as she spoke, said politely, but coldly, "Miss Colburn is not at home; will you leave a message?"

"No, thank you, I will wait!" She was unprepared for this sort of manœuvring, and taking no further notice of him, resumed her seat, and returned again to her book, which must have been highly interesting, for she seemed wholly absorbed in its contents, to the entire neglect of the distinguished caller. The shaded gas-jet, held in the mailed hand of a bronze Cæsar on the table beside her, appeared rather dim, she thought, and she was not exactly sure whether the fascinating book was upside-down or not. She wore a rich pearl-colored silk, that lay all around her in shining waves broken on the violets and lilies of the carpet by the red velvet cushion at her feet. As Philip had no book and could not sit still, he began to pace up and down the floor as if he were taking its dimensions, and was very particular about it, and thus perambulating, fifteen minutes elapsed — she intent on the book without once looking up, but all the while she was counting the quick, regular steps, and knew when the measured tread stopped before her. Philip was in plain-citizen dress, — sword, sash, shoulder-straps, and buttons were not, and perhaps she liked him better so. He was in faultless evening costume. The one rapid glance told her that, and the absence of gold and glitter was an actual relief, and there was a sweet, nameless odor about him quite unlike powder. If Philip had a weakness it was for fragrant perfumes, and the secret of this especial and favorite one had been bequeathed to him by an old French captain who had only parted with it in death. It was delicate, and subtilely

fragrant, and stole over her senses like the delicious scent of dewy garden-roses. With compressed lips and folded arms Philip looked down upon her, and unbidden the lustrous dark eyes left the pages and went slowly up to his. She could not help it — if she were to die she could not help it. The full dark eyes met the sharper black, but neither spoke, nor smiled, nor stirred. It was the gaze of a charmed bird, and possessing the will, she had not the power to withdraw it.

"Gypsy!" There was a heart-burst of anguish in the single utterance, and throwing himself on the cushion at her feet, he pillowed his head in her lap, and cried as he did at Elinor's knee. The great drops splashing the pearl-silk robe, made Philip Shirley greater to her than all his victories. Pride, perversity—everything gave way before this one grand feeling, and he whose simple word had sent a whole army into action and held a nation in suspense, sobbed like a child at the feet of the woman whose love he had in years agone deliberately thrown away, that he might the sooner climb the dizzy heights from which his tears now fell, eloquently telling that all beside it was nothing.

She did not speak, but her hands crept down his face until the white fingers locked under his chin, and the white arm against his cheek was as soft as the silken sleeve shimmering its lace trimming amid the black of his crisp hair. After all, it was Philip's face, and she could not be harsh with it. The touch was familiar, and the outline from brow to throat the same that her girlhood had loved. And her voice, oh! it was very sweet, and low, and pitiful.

"When a soldier like you can find a place in his soul where the tears are not dry, a woman should not scorn to weep, but I cannot; they scorched up my heart and parched my brain long ago. It is long since we parted, you and I, Philip, and both are changed. There are lines of care

on your forehead and silver threads in your hair that were not there when I saw it last. Ah! ambition will have its revenge!" She smoothed the few "silver threads," the soft, open palm moving aimless, half unconscious of its own motion. "I do not recognize my old ideal in this premature age, and you are only thirty-six. We will forget and forgive, and then let eternal silence settle between us forever."

"A curse on my cowardly weakness!" he cried, starting up and throwing off the caressing hands. "Forget! oh, would to God I could forget; but I am not a love-sick schoolboy to be mocked. I hate myself that I should so whimper out my feelings."

"You have won magnificent victories, Philip, but this is your greatest."

"And you can say it unmoved?"

"I can say it unmoved, but thankfully, for it has made me human again. I have conquered self, too; and to confess it, is not weakness — it is strength."

"I have humbled myself: will it bring perfect peace and forgiveness between us?'

"Perfect peace and forgiveness, Philip."

"And I may hope — "

"Nothing more. Some things, although forgiven, are yet unreconcilable, and *that* is one of them. It is useless to urge me differently. I have my father, and you the rich reward of your ambition. We have both gained what we longed and toiled for, and they must satisfy, for there is nothing left in life for us who made so ill use of its morning. It is now meridian, and our thoughts must be of the evening."

"Don't drive me to desperation," he cried, making a turn of the room, and coming back more composed to hold out his arms entreatingly. "Will you come, Imogene? I am sorry, I am sorry for all I ever said, did, or thought. Will

you come?" She strangled the mighty temptation urging her to his bosom, and was resolute.

"*No.*"

The extended arms fell to his side, and Imogene calmly arose to leave the room.

"Woman!" he said hoarsely, seizing her forcibly by the shoulder, "you have had your triumph and enjoyed it. You have looked at my mangled heart and jeered it. You have seen and felt my tears, and only one dead woman from boyhood until now, could ever say the same of Philip Shirley; and while I am suffering and tearing my soul for you, *you* sit serene and smiling, enjoying my misery, and looking the placid lady."

She did not shrink from his fierce grasp.

"Ah, now I recognize you! Philip; I know this mood, and it does not offend me."

This was too much.

"I have controlled thousands and I will control you. Answer me, and no prevarications: will nothing I can do or say in expiation of the past induce you to alter your determination?"

"Nothing. I was nurtured in a hard school, yourself the teacher. You sacrificed me, and, which is far worse, my mother's virtue, to your selfish ambition. You are in the proud niche where only a few stand. You wear an unconquerable sword and bear a deathless name — is it not enough?"

"But they are worthless without *you*."

"Once you thought I was worthless beside them."

"Don't taunt me with that most wretched past. I've lived beyond it. Let my faithful manhood win me something. Let it win what the foolish, short-sighted boy madly rejected."

"I would have spared you this, Philip. Let me go, and believe me yours is not all the pain."

He had never seen a look so utterly sad in those beautiful eyes before, so resigned and helpless, and he took courage.

"Answer me one question, only one, and let it be all the truth. Do you love me yet, Imogene?"

"As I do my beloved dead."

He turned away to hide the emotion the sad, solemn answer called forth, and when he looked up she was gone.

In her room Imogene thought, "I am not equal to another such interview. I feel it, and it is well that I go to-morrow. But it seems pleasant to be scolded and threatened and coaxed by him. It brings the old times and Davie nearer. Ah, she little thinks I am coming with the June blossoms. Let me see — if I go there to-morrow, I shall arrive there on the anniversary of my flitting, and that will be the fifth of the month — my fate day."

On the following day Philip called to pay his respects to Miss Colburn, for it had struck him that his unceremodious departure the evening before was not, according to the rules of good society, strict etiquette, and was informed by Olive that Imogene had left town.

"Now, Philip," said she, significantly, "you are not a skilful general when Cupid is in the field, if you allow him to advance and retreat in this trifling and impudent way. A close siege, and you might make your own terms. One repulse is nothing, and there is nothing like dear, old associations to break a woman's pride. I think a trip to Alden would greatly benefit you."

"You are clever at propounding, and I at guessing riddles."

He shook Olive's two little hands as if she had done him an exceeding good turn, looking wonderfully encouraged, cut his morning call short, and hurried away, to run against Colonel Murray in the hall, both rushing in opposite directions as fast as love could propel them.

Olive received the colonel most graciously, and invited him to a seat on the sofa beside her. But the colonel did not do important business from a side view, and, instead, drew a chair in direct range of the steel-gray eyes, sitting bolt upright on the extreme edge of his chair, like a man who had made up his mind to a stern and desperate purpose, and, blunt and compact as a round shot, made known his desires:

"I have known you two months, and I love you. Will you marry me, Olive?"

Such a point-blank, unexpected shot struck Miss Olive dumb, and the colonel, taking advantage of her silence, hitched into a little closer range, and took her unresisting hand. This was a change of position that brought out her reserve.

"Are you in earnest, colonel?"

"In dead sure earnest, Olive. I have said it in plain English, and I want the same kind of an answer. I am a blunt, rough old soldier, and don't understand any other language."

"But what on earth do you want of such a little, useless old maid as I?"

"I want a wife of her."

"And what will you do with me?"

"Love you all my life," promptly responded the bluff officer.

"I am little fitted to be a soldier's wife."

"I'll risk it," said the brave Walter, cheerfully. "I am not afraid to anchor my heart with you. I've been drifting about so long without home or love, that you will not deny me a place in your heart, Olive, when you fill all of mine."

"It is so very sudden and unlooked for, although I confess I—I thought you were not altogether indifferent. It is like one of your bold charges—so unexpected—I can hardly answer."

"My bold charges are always successful. Ask Shirley. About how long do you think it will take you to consider it?" anxiously inquired the unprocrastinating colonel.

"Oh, a week."

"A week! I should die with suspense." He hitched a little nearer. "May I kiss you, Olive?"

"Yes."

Olive held her head very straight while granting this solemn request, and the colonel looked a trifle sheepish.

"I don't understand making love by fashionable rules."

"You do very well for a novice," commented Olive; and, guided by that unerring instinct which was his main reliance, the saucy fellow neglected to remove his arm from about her waist, and she neglected to lift her head from his shoulder, for, by some hocus-pocus known only in love's bewildering jugglery, he had established himself on the sofa, and was progressing swimmingly toward a speedy "domestic altar."

"I've got a secret," she said, naively.

"Thunder!" He did not mean to be rude, but it slipped out unintentionally.

"About a century ago I—I loved somebody—I loved Philip Shirley. It was a sickly flame, and died out of itself."

"And he—"

"Never knew it."

The colonel felt immensely relieved. He did not relish running athwart his general in a love affair.

"He never cared three straws for me, save as my father's daughter. I was lame then; and I am lame yet, Walter," she said, lowering her cheek to the colonel's row of brass buttons. "Do you mind?"

"Not a bit. Go on," giving her an assuring hug.

"Yes, I was very lame, so that I was forced to go on crutches, and was almost helpless. Haven't I scared you

yet?" (assuring hug again;) "and Philip was kind. He was always kind to girls, and I was alone, shut from the world and congenial companionship, gloomy and brooding over my wretched lot; and when he came into my life, strong, gentle, and brave, I went to dreaming about him, as a girl of my secluded and joyless existence naturally would, and it lasted two years."

"A long dream," parenthetically remarked the colonel. "Any more like it?"

"No, that was my first and last, and he never suspected it; for he had been loving a beautiful face all his life, and is loving it yet."

"Whose face is it?"

"Oh, that is not my secret, and so you cannot have it. Philip is not what he was in those days, and now I could not love him. The first look I gave him after my long absence—I had him ideally shrined in Paris, and thought the great general was like the boy captain of my heart—made me wonder how I ever did. One of his harsh, cross looks would frighten me to death."

"And I have a secret too, Olive."

"Oh, goodness!"

"I had a passion for a girl once, and it stuck by me from my cadet days up to within two months ago, when I met another dainty little creature, and Olive Colburn laid the ghost of the past forever."

"A rather adhesive passion, I should say," said Olive, slyly.

"Yes; I proposed—she rejected me. She feared a lieutenant's pay, and, by Jove, it *is* enough to frighten a timid woman, who is fond of silk dresses and spring bonnets! That was a sweet dream, but *this* is a sweeter reality."

You may be sure the emphasized "this" was properly demonstrated in such a manner that Olive could not mistake as to whom it referred. Then there were more kisses,

and slightly inaudible murmurs of "darling, sweetest, dearest," and the upshot of it all was that Olive Colburn at thirty-five was irredeemably engaged to that confirmed old bachelor, Walter Murray, of forty-one honored years, spent in the turmoils of war's rude alarms.

The happy colonel flew at once to his general, helped himself to a cigar, put his feet on the table, and hurled at him the mighty change that had come upon him.

"I am going to be married, general."

"The deuce you are!"

"Yes, I am plighted to Olive Colburn; congratulate me."

"With all my heart. She is a dear, kind girl, and will make a charming, kind, good wife. I knew her when she was frail as a baby, with a cheek and hand of wax. I used to carry her about the grounds at Colburn Hall, and she liked me, and was so grateful in return."

"Yes; I know she was," said Murray, dryly. "But when am I to congratulate you?"

"When time goes backward, and I am a boy again, proud of my cadet straps."

"Phew! that's certainly indefinite; but good-by, I'll see you again to-morrow."

"No you don't. I leave town to-night."

"Halloo, what's up?"

"Oh, a whiff of country air; that's all. I wish you joy of your bride-elect, and, as those dear pledges of 'importance and respectability' that you once included in your visions of matrimony must be provided for, I now promote you General Murray by brevet, and chief of staff."

Murray was nearly beside himself.

"By Jupiter, general, you are the right man in the right place this time, any way; and if those premature pledges are not grateful, I'll thrash the little rascals into gratitude."

Shirley laughed, the only real laugh the colonel had

ever been so fortunate as to hear from Philip, and motioned him out.

Olive sought her father and said, blushing as if she were not thirty-five:

"Colonel Murray will see you this evening, and whatever he may say, papa, my heart will respond to."

"And so, Olive, you have stolen a march on your old father, and the tall officer will ask for my daughter?"

A rosy face hid its bloom and tears on his breast, and Lot Colburn was willing that the tall officer should have her.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE DÉNOÛMENT ASTOUNDS DAVIE.

A BRIGHT June afternoon welcomed Imogene's arrival to Alden, and from the platform, gloomy and wet the night of her flight, she hurried to gain the highway leading past the Lee farm house, without giving a glance to the people sauntering about the depot, and lolling on the store stoops and hotel piazzas in indolent, curious village style. Once out of sight she slackened her pace and strolled along the grassy roadside, all the fields and hills and trees as familiar as the faces of old friends. She stopped before the old rock, and looked up at its gray summit as if it must know her footsteps. The hickory leaves, trembling in the soft current of the upper air, were motionless on the lower branches, green and tender and not yet full grown, but checkering the grass where the shadows played over it in the same flickering, uncertain, and frolicking way her childhood remembered so well. The hazel thicket seemed denser and the white blossoms of the rank elders more

abundant than when she played with Philip beneath their tangled shade.

"I petrified here," she said, drawing off her glove to gather a few buttercups and clovers growing in the crook of the fence. "I lost heart, faith, and God, and have never found them since." When she came in sight of the old brown house the sun was just setting, and the last red rays bathed in splendor the green south meadows, and lighted the small panes of the narrow west windows to gold and scarlet, gorgeous and dazzling as the prism's coloring. Imogene paused outside the gate to note the little figure sitting in the open doorway: Davie, at her everlasting worsted-work — a sumptuous affghan of many hues — a pile of bright wools in her lap — placid, sunny, untroubled Davie, quietly sitting on the old door-stone of the old home, careless and happy as in her girlhood. Thaddeus was coming home to marry Davie, and this was the sweet bride-elect of Senator Ruggles. The watcher at the gate came up the walk under the maples, and the worker looked up.

"Davie!"

"Imogene!"

In a second the bright worsteds were scattered all over the door-stone and half-way to the gate in Davie's haste to meet her, and the two sisters in heart, if not in blood, were again united. Neither could speak for several minutes.

"I did not think you would know me, Davie," said Imogene, holding her off to get a better look of her happy face. "You are not a bit changed."

"Nor you. I should know you anywhere; and to take me so by surprise," returned Davie, wiping her eyes and picking up the worsteds. "Old Mrs. Johnson is dead, all the folks have gone to the funeral, and won't be back this hour. Ain't you 'most tired to death, and hungry, too? I'll run and tell Hetty to put the kettle on."

Davie flew to the kitchen and was back again in a twinkling.

"There, I've hurried up Hetty, and you shan't perish of hunger. Now, tell us all about it. Let me take off your things. You were so cruel not to write oftener, and so tantalizingly brief. What a dear little bonnet! I know you have lots to tell, and I am dying to hear."

"It is all comprised in five words, Davie. I have found my father."

"Well, now!"

Miss Lee could say no more, and fell back in astonishment to recover her breath, and then Imogene concisely related the whole story, frequently interrupted by her listener's ejaculations of wonderment.

At the conclusion, Davie said mysteriously:

"I have something to tell you, too, not quite so romantic, but it inclines that way; wait till we are snug up stairs, and we will talk until morning. It is so funny; I laugh myself every time I think of it."

This funny secret would doubtless have exploded in Davie's loose keeping before the up-stair snugness had been achieved, if David and his wife had not, at the perilous juncture, drove up.

"Hide, Genie; I'll tell mamma a stranger wants to see her, and see if she will know you," she cried, in a flutter of excitement, hustling Imogene into the parlor.

Being so summarily disposed of, Genie ran to the window, and peeping from behind the corner of the curtain, saw them alight, remarking that neither were as nimble as when she saw them last.

Davie, in the adjoining room, could scarcely contain herself, and ran down the path to meet her mother, before that good lady's skirts had fairly cleared the wheel.

Of course, just coming from solemnizing the last rites of the venerable Mrs. Johnson, Ruth was not in a particularly

hilarious mood, and was quite shocked at her daughter's superabundant activity of hands and feet and tongue.

"Hurry, mamma! I'll take off your bonnet. Ah, never mind, it won't hurt, and there is some one in the parlor anxious to see you."

"Davie, child!"

"I know, mamma; poor old lady!"

"You should be—"

"Glad she is at rest;" and she pushed the shocked Ruth along, heedless of the funeral news, that would otherwise have riveted her best attention.

"Aunt Ruth, I have come home at last. Did I so desecrate your love that you can give me no blessing?"

Mrs. Lee sank into a chair, and Imogene fell on her knees at her feet, and a kind, trembling hand dropped light on her head.

"Lord, thou hast heard my prayer—the one long prayer for this girl since she left me! Elinor, I have kept the covenant, and in heart have never deserted her." Her face hid its mingled tears and emotion on the wanderer's shoulder, bowed to meet the offered kiss, and for the space of five holy minutes nothing was heard but Davie's soft crying by the window.

David's voice broke the hush. "Hello, black-eyes as I live! and not too great a lady to kiss old David, I know."

The old farmer took her away from his wife, and gave her a smack so loud and long, that Davie covered her weeping eyes with one hand and her laughing mouth with the other, and sat her on his knee. Mother and daughter gathered around him, and huddled together. They all kissed, and cried, and hugged each other—only Imogene did not cry, but the choking in her throat was so painful, and her eyes so burning, that she almost fainted under the stifling feeling.

It was over at last, with the tea and talk that necessarily

and naturally follows a reunion of the kind; and Davie was at liberty to drag Genie off up stairs, and, in the full consciousness of its greatness, divulge the funny secret.

Imogene no sooner found herself in the familiar apartment than she ran to the window.

"Well, I declare," said Davie, remonstratingly, "you are back to the old lookout, and I am aching to make weighty disclosures, and ask a hundred questions. Would you see me burst in ignorance?"

"I have not the hardness to disregard so touching an appeal," replied Genie, composing herself to listen. "Go on; I am not *blasé* of secrets yet."

Davie, who delighted in a tragic *coup de main* above all things, folded her hands in a reverent attitude, and solemnly said:

"Imogene, I am engaged."

"I know it."

"Who told you?"

"Oh, a little bird sang me a song, and I found that warble in it."

"A naughty, tattling bird. But you can't guess who he is — or did your songster sing that too?"

"Yes, Thaddeus Ruggles. I wish you joy — oh, dear little Davie, long years of joy!"

Davie looked disappointed, but warmly returned her kiss of congratulation. Instead of astonishing, she had been astonished.

"A plague on that bird! It has forestalled me, and now I have nothing to tell; only I'd like to know how you found out my funny secret," lugubriously bemoaned Thad's affianced, the picture of mystification.

"I have been at Washington for something like two months."

"And did not write? that is too bad of you."

"Don't scold. I wanted to take you by surprise, and I

had been in the habit of writing so seldom; besides, I had a fancy to make my coming and going an anniversary."

"You are forgiven. Proceed. I am interested in that gossiping bird."

"Why, you have guessed, of course. Thaddeus told me, one evening at a gay levee, where I happened to stumble on him, and in the coolest manner possible: 'I am going home to marry Davie,' as quietly as if marrying Davie was an every-day occurrence."

"Oh! the wretch, to be so flippant. I'm half a mind to jilt him," pouted Davie.

"You are mistaken; he was not flippant, and not in the least lucid. He left the most to conjecture, for that was all he said on the subject, word for word. He is a rising man, and you will be a distinguished personage in Washington when Miss Lee is transformed into Mrs. Ruggles."

"I am sure I never thought of that part of it. You see, Genie, Thad came home about a year ago, and — and, well I've always liked him, although he is quite a paternal lover. Not exactly the sort of feeling I had for Phil, you know; but it does very well; and as I have no better for anybody else, I dare say it will do nicely. What a ridiculous affair that was, though, with Philip," merrily laughed the little witch.

"By the way, I ought not to speak so familiarly of our *ci-devant* village pest. Who could have believed that he would have blossomed out into a full-blown prince of generals? Alden is very proud of him now, and people are vain of the pranks he played on them, and anything he ever touched is sacredly treasured by those so lucky as to have anything once possessed by him. Philip a great soldier, and you a titled lady of France! How strangely things do turn out!"

"And why not add, 'And I a to-be sedate senator's lady?'" suggested Imogene.

"Oh, I am not, nor never shall be anybody but Davie, though Thad goes on patronizing me for a century. I am one of the fixed planets, and can't get out of my orbit if I should try, for I would not know where to go to. Poor Thad! He is very grave and severe. I vow, I feel quite patriotic just thinking of it. And he so wise and learned, and I that never even read the Constitution that he has so pat, and remember but one line of the Declaration of Independence, and that I learned at school as a punishment for a lesson I did not get. Goodness, how I suffered over that one obligatory research into my country's intricate history! I shall never forget it. 'All men are, and of right ought to be, free and independent'—that's the line, and very true, too. Now, Thad knows all the rest of it, just as well as I do this scrap. He need not fear my ever crowding him from the rostrum."

"So long as there are books for Thaddeus, and worsted for you, Davie, your talents will not clash," consoled Imogene.

"I suppose not. But did you ever realize that you and I are genuine old maids, passed the Rubicon two years ago? A melancholy fact that the family-record in the Bible won't allow of contradiction."

"Yes, I realize it, but do not regret it," said Genie.

"Indeed, you are a wonder. It frightened me, or did until Thad had the grace to propose. Now, tell me honest, are you not engaged?"

"No, Davie."

"But you had offers?"

"I will not deny that while you were inveigling a senator, I was somewhat admired."

"No equivocating. Were there no out-and-out offers, from princes to counts? I don't suppose you would notice anything less. I have unbosomed myself, and you should be as generous."

"I made a slight impression on a few hearts, but nothing serious, I assure you; but there is a certain Duke de Charlier, whom papa urges me to consider favorably, but I shall not, further than esteem and friendship goes."

"Dukes are not plenty," said Davie, warningly.

"I know it; and beside, he is a noble and most worthy man."

"Mystery on mystery! And why not accept the noble paragon?"

"Only that I do not love him; and should I be so sordid as to permit his rank to dazzle me and count love out, I could not marry him. No, Davie; under any circumstances it would be utterly impossible."

"And why?"

"*Because I am Philip Shirley's wife!*"

Davie's blue eyes dilated in amazement, and were very round and bright for full ten astounded minutes:

"Well, I *am* beat!" She looked as if a very little more would have rendered her helpless, as she was already nearly speechless. "And pray, Mrs. Shirley, how long have you borne the euphonious title?"

"Since I was fifteen."

This was equally wonderful, and Davie sank back under the second shock, unable to articulate a single word.

"I am in a mood for confessing this evening, provided you promise to be forever silent."

"Red-hot pincers shall not tear the secret from me," vowed Davie.

"I do not think pincers, and the like obsolete implements of torture, will be brought into requisition, so I will venture the confession. You remember the sleigh-ride that cold day, when Aunt Ruth was opposed to my going?"

"Perfectly well."

"If I had listened to her I should have been spared a world of trouble and sorrow. We drove fifty miles that

afternoon, and were married at a little country parsonage on the way. A clumsy old minister officiated, and his wife and the cook were witnesses, and that is the way Imogene, daughter of Jasper, Marquis of Vahl, was married, and that is why she cannot marry, were she so inclined, the Duke de Charlier."

Davie held up her hands in sheer astonishment, completely beyond comment on this extraordinary revelation.

"You know how he neglected me on his succeeding visit, and I resented the slight. I met him under the hickory in the evening, at his request, as he said, to explain, and there he taunted, or rather threw it at me, in the way of strengthening his argument, of my birth. Reflecting, as it did, on my mother, I would not forgive. What took place there is not for me to speak; enough that it drove me from you, Davie; and why I fled so secretly was that my going should not reach his ears. I was revengeful, then, and he had always loved me, despite the incongruity of his conduct, and I knew that not to know where I was would strike him deep; and then, again, he might have resorted to his legal authority, and compelled me to do his bidding, at least so far as my doing as I pleased was concerned; so I baffled him and the village, confident that you would send him the most specific details in the most harrowing style you could command."

"Oh, you implacable! No wonder you were so terrified when I confided to you, in trusting innocence, the puerile penchant I had for—ahem!—your husband. And now I recollect, I was a sort of go-between all the time. What a goose I must have appeared," and they both laughed at the ludicrous reminiscence.

"Philip was my god in those days, and if he had bade me hold my hand in the fire I should have unhesitatingly complied. The chord snapped too late to save me, and it was long before I found heart to look the world in the face."

"It would have killed me," said Davie, regulating the gravity of her mirthfulness by Imogene's sudden soberness.

She had her doubts of Davie's dying of any sort of heart complaint, but refrained from expressing it, alluding only to herself.

"But I am made of sterner stuff, and shrivelled inwardly. I kept a little love for you and Aunt Ruth, and cast out the rest. Not that I am entirely unmindful of Philip. The old tyrant frequently grapples me unaware, and I am forced to keep continually on the defensive."

"*I'd* let the old tyrant have his way, if it were my case," said Davie, determinedly. "You love him yet, Genie, and there is no use your trying to deny it; there is not so much viridity about me as you think. If I were you, Imogene, I would follow my heart; and if it carried me back to him, I would not resist."

"The wrong he did *me* he has atoned, and I have forgiven. The wrong he did a sorrow-stricken woman's dust is not mine to forgive. I met him in Washington a few days since. Look at me now, and judge if I were merciful."

Davie looked, and saw a beautiful face, cold and hard as marble, pitiless and inflexible as a rock, and made no further plea for Philip.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

PHILIP WINS HIS LAST VICTORY.

THE frolicking June breezes, toying with the leaves and flowers, tempted Imogene to a ramble among the old haunts, and she set out to live over again the days of her youth. Davie had just told her how kind Philip had been to poor Mary Parker, and at his own expense and under his personal supervision had sent on the body of her dead husband, and had written her a letter, an hour after she was a widow, that had taken away much of the pain. Imogene did not feel so relentless toward him after that, for if he could be thoughtful of the widow and the fatherless, there must be something of the angel in him yet. And while she went on down the lane, thinking better of him, the birds were twittering lovingly in the trees, the larks and bobolinks singing merrily in the meadows, balancing gracefully on the bending head of a thistle, or swinging airily on the swaying buds of the tall meadow-lilies, and the ringdove was cooing in the belt of woods beyond the blue flags and cowslips of the marsh. Ah! after all the splendor, it was home here! Imogene felt it, and leaning against the wall under the tree, where Phil had attended the obsequies of the maimed bat, she folded her arms on the cool stones, and looked off across the quiet landscape. "Nothing is changed; all is as I left it—nothing is changed but me," she murmured, plaintively. A bright-eyed striped squirrel scampered past her, and whisking his tail over his head, sat down on the wall at a respectful distance to look at her. It recalled another memory, and she could not help uttering her sad regrets aloud. "I am so sorry that I have not lived my better self; so

sorry that my life is such a wreck. So sorry; ah! so sorry!"

"*Won't you let me be sorry with you, Gypsy?*"

She started in superstitious terror. Was heaven giving back her childhood? She turned in dismay, and there beside her smiled Philip Shirley. She retreated haughtily.

"Will you never have done tormenting me? You have marred my soul into a hideous semblance of what a woman's should be, and let the ruin content you. Leave me to glean the little joy your ruthlessness has spared me. Leave me."

"No, Imogene, I will not. I do not care for your anger, pride, nor sarcasms; they are a woman's weapons, and I never feared them. I am going to ask a question that you must answer unreservedly. Do you love me?"

His voice was iron, but she replied evasively:

"You have asked that question before, sir; and, if I remember aright, I think I answered it plainly."

"I ask it again, and will not be denied."

"Do I love you? Ask all these years of misery; ask of the blight and mildew that, like a mouldy garment, has fallen on the truth and faith I plighted. Did I love you? Like the rest of our lives, it is a mockery."

"It is not *did* you love me; the question is *do* you love me?"

"I think I can say, like Mary of England, that after death they will find the name of Philip engraved on my heart."

"But Mary hated Philip."

"And I loved him."

"Obstinate and non-committal to the last. But I am satisfied. Even while you speak of me as past, you love me dearly, and you are mine. There is no use struggling, Gypsy, for the chains will not break."

"But they will," she retorted fiercely, aggravated by his manner of calm authority, "and shall. The law, at word

from me, will strike off my fetters, and you are powerless to hinder."

"Look back to the past, Imogene, and see if you have the courage to do it."

"I do not believe in retrogression."

"That may be, but I'll put my faith in the time when we were children. I heard a rumor in Washington that the marquis was solicitous of your union with a French duke. Is it true?"

"It is true."

"And you?"

"He is my father, and it is my duty to obey him."

"Then understand that *I* forbid it. You are my wife, and by the God above us, I'll see you dead, but no man's bride," he grated vehemently.

"A stronger power than yours guards me now, and you and your claims are alike impotent."

The words were contemptuous, but her furtive glance was gentle, for woman-like, it rather pleased her to be held worth fighting for.

"You have not outlived your satire, that is certain; but I am not to be intimidated by it, as you shall see, for I am going to ask another question."

"I do not recognize your right to question me, sir."

"But I do, and that is sufficient."

"For the sake of my personal safety, I presume I ought to defer to your arbitrary assumptions, remembering that you have the physical strength to enforce your dictations." The covert reference struck home. His features grew livid, in startling contrast with the heavy black moustache and jetty brows, and the expression was one not to be lightly called to Philip Shirley's face. It touched her. "I did not mean that, Philip; and to make amends, ask what you will, and I will answer truthfully."

"Will you appeal to the law?"

She hesitated. His face was still white, and her own gradually softened. "*No;* not for all the splendor beneath this wide blue sky would I sever or discountenance the poor, pitiful, child-tie that binds you and me, Philip. The bondage is dearer from its pain, and I have ever been true to it."

It was beautiful to see the eyes he turned on her.

"Gypsy, my child-wife, are we never to be reconciled? Are there no amends that I can make that will span the gulf? Tell me anything, and I will do it. I have wronged you past forgiveness, I know, but I'll bow the knee, and pray it at your hands. What can I do to show you my deep contrition?"

"Leave me! only leave me; it is all I ask." Her quivering lips and downcast eyes gave the lie to the words, but she would not retract. "You remember my vow, and I will keep it. It stands between you and me eternally."

"A preposterous vow, invalid the moment it was uttered, for at that very time you were not Imogene Vale, nor a peeress of France, but Imogene Shirley, *my wife,* and exactly that which you swore you would not be; nothing more nor less, and a very stubborn and unalterable fact, too. I have loved, and scolded, and wounded you, but you are my darling, for all; and as you hold an impossible vow so sacred, I will hold a possible one more sacred, and, in the name of your dead mother, claim you — she who laid my wicked head on her dying heart, and implored me to be kind to Genie. I promised; and, by the heavens she has entered, I will keep the promise. Her blessing is in the air — it is all around us. She is bending from the clouds; I see her fair hair and rose-tinted cheeks — the thin fingers are on my head, and her voice, like a prayer, in my ears. It is only a cloud; it is only a stirring leaf, but to me it is Elinor; my battle-angel, my saint. I sinned, and I repented. I went astray, and I suffered; and now I ask the reward of suffering."

Imogene followed his gaze to the sky in a hush of awe, as she had that day under the lilacs.

"It is not just to attack the only weak spot my heart has not fortified. Let my mother's dust rest."

"She knows I need her aid, and she comes to say peace between us. I have reasoned and entreated you in vain, but it must end here; it is only pride that holds you back, and you shall not leave this spot until the happiness-destroying despot is crushed, never again to rise up against *me*. You must own up, Gypsy, for you can't go till you do. You will find me firm as ever, and surrender you must."

"I will answer you to-morrow, sir," she said, in stately condescension, as if the conversation was ended.

"Ah, no you won't. I never lost a victory yet by leaving it half won, and I don't intend to this. You are a prisoner until you agree unconditionally to my terms."

"But, Philip —"

"But Gypsy —"

His hand was caressing the rings of hair on her forehead — the gentle hand of other days — and her eyes, tender as eyes could be, went lovingly up to the love of his.

"I am waiting."

His voice was at its sweetest cadence, and the soldier had conquered.

"*Take me, Phil*, my heart is bursting."

And, almost lifeless, she was in his arms, sobbing out the "anguish of those many years." The long enforced constraint gave way, and the monster pride lay dead, and, half ashamed of his reign and dethronement, she turned her wet face to the old tyrant's bosom, leaving Philip to make the most of the small portion of brow left visible. The new king tangled his fingers in the ebon curls falling over his arm in a glossy mesh — "*A thing to be jewelled and braided and kissed*" — and for half an hour spoke not a word; and during that time she was only conscious

of a heart beating against her cheek; and he that it was Gypsy, his beautiful wife, rid of her trouble, and home in his arms forever. The little striped squirrel skipped by, the black bead-like eyes big as a surprised chipmunk's could well be extended, and the inquisitive glance he bestowed on the two people making themselves so much at home under his storehouse, aroused Philip to the sense and propriety of saying something.

"When a woman like you can weep, a man should not scorn to sympathize. Come, I want to see your face."

"Don't tease me, I feel so bad," was the smothered response from the depths of his shirt-bosom.

"Feel bad? why, I never was so happy. The sleigh-ride was nothing to this. There, you have had a nice long cry, and I did not interrupt you, so give us a glimpse of your eyes."

She would not turn her head, although she did not refuse to reply.

"You wanted me here, and now I 'll stay."

"All right. I am too thankful for the shower to care for a speedy sunlight," returned Phil, contentedly. He knew the different degrees that must be gone through with before the calm was reached, and patiently waited for the violent sobs to subside into passive weeping, and the passive weeping to merge into long-drawn sighs, that in turn finally became deathly silence.

Imogene had passed the violent and the passive, and was comfortably enjoying the sighs before going off into the recuperative silence, which would be succeeded by a portentous restlessness, indicative of a desire to talk, or be talked to. Philip noted all the signs, but said nothing, and of her own accord Imogene lifted herself a little higher, so that her forehead touched his chin.

"Phil, is all the misery over?"

"Yes; unless you insist on a divorce."

"Don't trifle, please; I feel as if I were in a holy place."

Her arm slipped around his neck, clinging tremulously, as in her tempestuous childhood.

"It seems so natural to have you fond of me again, Phil."

And the tears, like summer rain, fell anew for joy. Philip readily took up his old *rôle* of soothing.

"Don't cry, Gyp; you are all tears and tumble."

And for the tattered Samaritan-sleeve of his youth, Philip substituted the finest and most delicately perfumed cambric handkerchief; but the tears were too fast and heavy for the thin fabric, and ran hot on his hand; so he gave up the office to kiss the drenched eyes and quivering lips. The half-sorrowful, half-smiling mouth recalled the blood-spot on the snow, and his kiss fell tenderest there.

"Compose yourself now, Gypsy, dear little bride-wife of thirteen years, and we will talk of our happy future."

Obeying meekly, as was her wont when Philip was gentle with her, she put back her rumpled hair, and, folding her hands on his knee, in the trustful child fashion, she looked up in his face with the old eager, adoring expression he knew so well, and listened to what his life had been since they last met in the lane; and when it was ended she took his hand, and together they strolled through the fields to the cemetery, for there was something there that she wanted him to see.

Elinor's simple slab had disappeared, and a costly monument was in its place. Standing on either side, they read:

"Sacred to the memory of Elinor, beloved wife of Jasper, Marquis of Vahl."

Imogene sat down on the green mound, and, absently smoothing the short grass, said:

"I had it cut in Italy; the inscription below is papa's, 'A husband's last tribute to a dear and devoted wife;' and the one still lower, mine — 'Mother, thy memory is my

hope of heaven.' This is all we could bring her from France."

Philip rested his hand on the wreath of sculptured lilies encircling the name, and placing the other on her bowed head, said, sadly but forcibly:

"I promised her that I would be kind to you, and, but for the one moment of madness I was, and then I loved you, I stand here with a free conscience."

For answer, she kissed the hand resting on the marble lilies, and whispered: "I know it; I always knew it." And for her belief was nestled up to his side, and scolded for her long exile of him. Along the pebbly walks, among the sombre firs, through the little gate, and down the hill into the lane again they came, subdued but happy; and as he let down the bars for her, he said, "I'll call this evening," and light of heart Philip went toward his dingy home, where a gray old mother had heard of, but had not seen her boy since he was famous, and Imogene paused by the garden fence to inhale the dreamy odor of the lilacs until reminded by the sinking sun that tea and Davie were waiting for her.

"You look not the least depressed by your wanderings," cried Miss Vida, meeting her at the door. "Have you visited the tryst and laid the old tyrant?"

"Yes. I met him face to face, and he will trouble me no more."

"That is splendid; tell us about it."

"Not now. It will explain itself."

After tea and a fresh toilet, they repaired to the parlor, Imogene volunteering music and Davie acquiescing. A quick step sounded on the door-stone, but Imogene played on vigorously, pretending not to hear it, nor Davie's accompanying exclamation of surprise:

"Philip Shirley, as I live!"

"And my sister Davie's most obedient."

The kiss he planted on her lips by no means served to lessen her agitation. A swift, frightened look at Genie, and she precipitately fled; but, glancing back, was shocked to see the audacious officer, without the shadow of a preliminary permission, walk up to the apparently innocent player, lift up her chin, and impertinently press that great, coarse, black moustache of his to her smiling mouth—ugh! Davie dared not witness the result of the outrage, mentally wondering why people would tell such fibs and prate about their vows.

"If I loved a man I'd say it, and not screen it behind a silly oath that no woman ever keeps—pooh!"

Oblivious of Davie's deep disgust, Imogene remonstrated:

"Oh, what a bear! You have spoiled my *aria*."

"I'll finish it," and he popped her off the music-stool in a trice, but as the general labored under the great musical disadvantage of not knowing "b" from "c," he made bad work of it, and insisted that she should sit on his knee and play for him.

"How absurd you are, Phil!" But she complied all the same, and recommenced the interrupted *aria*.

"Hem!" said Davie, coming in at this juncture. Curiosity got the better of her fears, and she came to see whether it was to be peace or war. Circumstances indicated that there was no danger of the latter, and she signified her astonishment in a series of gentle coughs.

"What is the harm of kissing my wife!" said Phil, twinkling his left eye toward Genie.

"None in the world," said Davie, elevating her brows. "But I would like to know if that is the Parisian style of taking music-lessons."

"The very latest," affirmed the unabashed Phil.

Imogene's face was scarlet. "I am sure Davie thinks you a goose."

"Indeed I do—a pair of them. You should be more

staid and philosophical. I expected to find you glaring at each other, and here you are turtle-doving at a rate that surpasses anything I ever dreamed of."

"Wait until Thad comes, and then see, Miss Davie, if you don't get enlightened."

It was her turn to blush now, and a picture opposite seemed to possess great attraction for some moments.

"Hush, Phil!" chided Imogene, and she made the hush more forcible by putting her hand over his mouth. "*You* shan't tease Davie, and *she* shall tease you. There is nothing of the hyena in either my sister or brother that-is-to-be, and the turtle-dove epoch will come in good time."

The picture still absorbing Davie, Genie dropped a sly little kiss on the great brow, and received a telegraphic squeeze in return.

How fast time flies when we are happy!

Genie thought so, at any rate, and when ten o'clock struck, said shyly: "Uncle David still keeps early hours, Philip; shall I walk with you to the gate?"

Philip made a very wry face.

"Now, Gyp, that is what I call decidedly cool, and deuced rough usage besides; just to think of the wife of my bosom turning me out like a country booby who has overstaid his sparking-time. May I ask how long this uncomfortable state of things is to last?"

"Until I know myself again. I don't feel exactly right about it; and don't you think, Philip, we ought to—to be married again?"

"Married again! Lord! no. One marrying gave me trouble enough; twice might play the mischief over again, and you don't catch me at it the second time." But, seeing her serious, he soberly added: "No law of God or man can unite us more legally, loyally, and lovingly than we are, and I do not want to dim the picture of how I married my child-wife by the splendors that would attend the nuptials

of a lord's daughter. I should feel a bigamist all the days of my life; and nothing shall supplant the memory I have of a little trembling girl, in a scarlet hood, who stood up by my side in a cold seven-by-nine coop of a country parson's parlor, and promised to love me until death do us part. I remember it as if it was but yesterday. The parson hunting for his glasses, his little old wife rummaging for her best cap, and the cook wiping the dishwater from her hands on the corner of her apron, that had been thoughtfully turned wrong side (and consequently clean side) out, in honor of the ceremony. I remember Zephyr's reeking coat, and that I stabled him, so happy that I could not find the oats, nor his blanket, nor a blessed thing to rub him off with. I married Gypsy, and I'll have nothing to do with the marquis's daughter."

"I guess you are right, Phil, and we will let the old picture stand."

"That's it, sweet. Give me a kiss; and if I must go, you won't be offended if I light a cigar in your presence, to keep me company."

She walked with him to the gate, and saw him depart, whistling as he went along the dewy road, and his cigar glowing cheerily in the quiet summer night.

CHAPTER XL.

DISTINGUISHED ARRIVALS AND DISTINGUISHED DEPARTURES.

A FEW days after, Philip had the grace to announce to his lady a bit of intelligence that thoroughly astonished her.

"By the way, Gypsy, I have forgotten to tell you that your quondam mistress is to be married soon."

"What, Olive! Why, Phil; and not to tell me before! I am ashamed of you."

"Are you? That is too bad; but connubially inclined is our Olive, and meditateth matrimony. Yea, veritable wedlock; and the lucky man that hath inclined her thus is my old plague, Colonel Walter Murray."

"Oh, be serious, Phil. I believe you are joking."

"No, I am not, upon my word. Little Olive is going to marry Murray, and no mistake. And by all that is wonderful, here they are at the gate! Talk of Satan, and he is at your elbow."

Mrs. Shirley did not hear the last equivocal remark, for she was running to meet Olive before it was fairly uttered. Kisses, introductions, and exclamations of course followed as fast as feminine lips could enunciate. Murray eyed his chief dubiously, and felt like shaking Olive for her duplicity in leading him into such a confounded trap.

"What the devil are you doing here without leave of absence?" demanded the general, trying to be stern.

Murray saluted deprecatingly.

"Softly, general, I am under command of a superior officer. *She* would have me; cashiered I may be, but to avoid a disobedience of orders I could not, for I did not

know where in the old Harry *you* were; so how was I to apply for a leave of absence? Olive is small and meek-looking, general, but she is a woman of will, and upon my honor I had to come, my only hope being that I might get back before you did, but she artfully said that she would stand between me and your displeasure, and that you owed her a good turn, and upon my life I hope you *do*, and that you will call this escapade even, general."

"I'll mitigate your sentence this time; but don't let your escapades of the kind become frequent."

"I trust it will make no difference about the brevet, eh?"

"Hang the brevet! No; stick the star on as soon as you please, and confound you! Come here, Gypsy. There, Murray, this is my wife, and you may kiss her once, but be careful that you don't do it again, sir," said Phil, pushing his blushing wife toward the equally blushing colonel.

"Your wife — ah! — I — well, general, you have made good use of your whiff of country air. Are there any important, respectable *et ceteras* behind all this, that I am expected to inquire after?" stammered the colonel, awkwardly saluting Imogene, who was glad to get away from both her teasing husband and the bashful Murray.

All the ladies simultaneously beat a hasty retreat, and the general and his companion had the parlor to themselves, and the latter thought it was his duty to significantly remark:

"The marquis is the guest of the Colburns. Won't it raise the deuce in that quarter?"

"Not a bit of it; and if it does, what do I care? I am able to give her a pretty fair sort of Yankee position, independent of my *blasé* papa-in-law, and I am rather under the impression that I took charge of her when *le grand* marquis was somewhat neglectful. Bless you, she has been my idol since baby-hood, and my wife for thirteen years. There was an estrangement — a mistake — but it was nobody's

business but our own, and the Emperor of France, *le grand père*, nor the devil himself can alter it," said Philip, emphatically.

"While the gentlemen were talking below, the ladies were not silent above.

"Walter is so impatient," said Olive, plaintively.

"If you will believe it, he insists on being married in two weeks, and when I told him that I could not possibly get up a decent *trousseau* in that time, he stared aghast, and wanted to know what *trousseau*, or anybody else, had to do with it. Poor fellow! he had not the slightest idea of what *trousseau* was, and when I explained, he said, more disrespectful than I thought him capable of, '*Trousseau* be hanged! shake out some of your superabundant Paris dresses, and call it *trousseau*, and neither I nor the village will know the difference.' Now, what am I to do?"

"Oh, marry and get rid of him," replied Davie, irreverently. "Mrs. Shirley here was married in a red worsted hood and mittens, and I don't see but she will live as long for it."

This turned the conversation from poor, ignorant Walter to Imogene.

"And so you are Philip's wife! Were there ever such secrets and counter-secrets, counterfeits, and idiocrasies heard of before? And what will you do if the marquis objects to your little romance, *ma belle?*"

"Philip was my husband when I was fatherless, and that will be my answer," was the quiet reply.

"And a convincing one, too," said Olive. "I persuaded Walter to walk over, that I might see how affairs were progressing before more important personages should appear on the scene, and in my delight at finding the tangle so beautifully unravelled, I have stupidly forgotten to tell you that my papa and your papa and that tall Oregon senator

— what's his name — were dining together when I came away, and may be expected here any moment."

The allusion to the "tall Oregon senator" sent Davie out of the room in a hurry; and Imogene briefly communicated to Olive the relation in which the tall "what's his name" stood to Miss Lee, just as Mr. Colburn's carriage drove up, and the three gentlemen in question alighted. The ladies at once repaired to the parlor, and as soon as the greetings were over Thaddeus excused himself, and went in quest of her whom he called mother.

In such a house-full of young people, the little brown-eyed matron had established her headquarters in the kitchen, and thither Mr. Ruggles bent his steps. Both were there — Ruth and David. And Ruth said, "God has blessed me in my boy," and kissed him in the fond, prideful, confiding way that mothers kiss good, obedient, worthy sons, and David slapped him heartily on the back, and said, "I am proud of you, Thad, and there is no man in the world to whom I'd so willingly give my daughter. She is all I have got, and when the old father and mother are gone I know she will be in trusty hands."

"Where is she?"

"Here I am, Thad," and she jumped into his arms, bumping her little head against his senatorial nose in the ardor of her greeting.

Mr. and Mrs. Lee, having "been through the mill," as David expressed it, considerately went to seek for something in the pantry, and did not return.

"Such funny things as do happen, Thad! Here is Imogene married this round dozen of years, and she and Phil looking daggers at each other up to a week ago, and now they are loving each other to death. It's a perfect shame; don't you think so?" burying her plump little hand in his hair, and half of her witching face eclipsed in his silky brown whiskers.

It was an open question as to which Davie considered a "perfect shame"—the daggers or the loving. Thad chose to consider it the latter.

"A very great shame indeed."

"Oh, you dear, sober, old Thad! I am quite scared at your dignity."

"Yes, you seem so, mauling me as if my hair was not susceptible to disorder or my raiment to wrinkles," said Thaddeus, relaxing into a benign fatherly smile. "You will never be old, Davie."

"Oh, no; but you are old enough for two," she replied, complacently.

Her head was not still a minute, bobbing about in a hap-hazard manner, that made it next to impossible for the Honorable Mr. Ruggles to keep up a connected discourse, on account of her little cranium so frequently coming in collision with the outlet of all human eloquence; and as the sedate lover was trying to impart his devotion, it must have been very trying. But Thad was patience personified, and after several futile attempts succeeded in getting her located in a listening attitude on his knee.

"I have worked hard that you might share fame and ease with me, and, excepting a few days, I have always loved you, Davie."

"I am exceedingly grateful for the first," she replied, demurely contemplating the floor; "but, nevertheless, you must give a strict account of those few traitorous days."

"With pleasure. During those few traitorous days I loved Imogene. The glamour was fleeting, I soon grew clear-sighted again; but I was under the spell, and the enchantment was delightful while it lasted."

"Well, sir, as confessions are the order of the day, all around, I'll retaliate by a like acknowledgment, and I'll not beat about the bush either. I loved Philip once. There! how do you like it?"

"You did?" nervously.

"Yes, for a month. It was a spell, a glamour, an enchantment; but I grew clear-sighted, too, because — I'll be more candid than you — he did not reciprocate. It was atrocious, but you set me the example, and can't find fault."

"And did he make no advances?" this very gravely.

"And did Imogene make no advances? Bless me, don't look an owl. No, it was only another specimen of love's *tracasserie;* and the fun of it was he did not know it. Poor boy! he was at the time a Benedick, and writhing under his conscience and Imogene's displeasure; and like a ninny I disburdened myself to Genie, and she grew as white as my dress; and said she, 'Oh, Davie, he is a poor penniless soldier, and a wife would soon become an encumbrance,' and a long rigmarole of the kind — and such hypocrisy as it was, too! What a pity she did not air her voluble sophistry in her *own* case, and not go and run off and marry the penniless soldier unbeknown to anybody, and go and make herself an encumbrance in such a wilful way. Charming philosophy, that of Mrs. Shirley; but everything is *comme il faut* now, Thad, so the longitude of your noble phiz has no further need of increasing. There, kiss me and go off; I am tired of you. Oh, dear! and I'm to have you on my hands forever and ever."

She threw him a kiss and danced away to the parlor, where a very different scene was transpiring.

"I believe I had the honor of meeting General Shirley in Washington," said the marquis, eying the hero suspiciously, for he did not relish his proximity to his daughter, who laid her hand affectionately on the officer's arm and quickly interposed.

"Allow me to introduce General Shirley by another, and nearer title, and make you acquainted with him as my husband."

"Your what?"

"My dear and honored husband."

Philip put his arm around her and looked at the marquis rather more defiantly than a dutiful son-in-law should.

"My dear and honored wife; and I would like to see the man who would dare gainsay it."

"I presume I may be permitted to ask an explanation?" said the marquis, haughtily. "It is *my* daughter, sir, we are speaking of."

"I do not forget the relationship; but she has been my wife longer than your daughter, and I hold the better right." The marquis winced. Philip saw his advantage and followed it up. "I took her from her dead mother, a little, sobbing thing, friendless and alone, save the love of those who were not of her blood, but who have—and may God ever bless them—been always so kind and careful of her that she never lacked affection, and never knew toil, such as might have been her hard lot if her life and destiny had fallen in less sunny places. I promised Elinor that I would be kind to Imogene; and when I was old enough I married her, knowing that if living her mother would not object; and her father, being at the time a myth, I could not very well consult him on the matter. The trouble and separation that came between I am alone responsible for, but *she* has forgiven me, and I don't think I'll ask pardon of any one else."

Imogene gave his arm a sly admonishing pinch, for the general's temper was getting somewhat hot, and more gently addressed the ruffled *père*. "Yes, papa, there is a grave over there on the hillside, and its long-silent inmate knew I was fond of Philip; and of a truth, when my mother died I had no father."

The marquis softened.

"Poor Elinor! Are you happy and contented now, my child?"

"Oh, very happy and contented, papa."

"And was this the secret that made life so wearisome a burden in the grand conservatory at the Tuileries?"

"This, and my mother's clouded name."

"Then I will not mar your present joy, nor dim your happiness by my disappointment." He kissed her, and shook hands with Philip, consoling himself by the thought that if he was not a titled Frenchman, he was a great American, and, as rank was estimated in the two countries, about an even thing. So he said, with national characteristic warmth, "General Shirley, you have the most beautiful and accomplished wife in the universe. I wish you joy, and God bless you both;" and the next hour he spent beside the costly monument whereon was inscribed the name of Elinor.

All Alden was on the *qui vive* when it was known that Olive Colburn and Vida Lee were to be married on the same day in the village church, and that all who chose were free to witness the impressive double nuptials. Imogene insisted on furnishing Davie's wedding-dress, and, with her natural good taste and Paris knowledge, it was certainly a marvellous triumph — a misty, indescribable combination of satin, lace, veil, and flowers, that only a woman's mind, deeply imbued with matrimony for herself or another, could have created. Wedding-toilets are so trite that, like the schoolboy, we skip it, and only say that it was a credit to designer and wearer. And when Davie was all attired in her bridal white, she ran to the head of the stairs and cried: "Come up, Thad, and see if I suit you." Thad came, and was so delighted at the effect that he thought a kiss might not be out of place. Davie thought otherwise. "Don't, Thad; my veil and the orange-flowers are all fixed, and you will rumple me. 'Look, but please don't handle,' as they mark choice store-goods."

"Papa says I must give you these, with his congratula-

tions," said Imogene, coming in with a velvet jewel-case open in her hand.

"Oh, what a magnificent set of pearls! Genie, you've the best papa, next to mine, in the world. Just look, Thad." And in a twinkling the jewels were enhancing Davie's superb toilet, and she felt herself complete; and so pleased with the princely gift—for, although Davie did not know it, they were worth more than her father's farm—so absorbed in their admiration, she forgot all about being married, and when Thaddeus hinted that it was time to repair to church, she said:

"Oh, don't bother; this day seldom comes but once in a woman's life, and I am not going to be hurried. There, now, I am ready. I hope mamma won't cry, for if she does, I shall. Come on, and don't you step on my dress."

The little bride gathered up her lace and satin skirts, and went down the narrow stairway, no more to return Davie Lee.

"There is a trail for you, mamma!" looking over her shoulder at the yards of splendid train reaching, as plain David said, "from end to end of the parlor." Farmer Lee was to give his child away, and he was such a rough, clumsy old body, how dare he ever approach such a sea of flimsy fabrics. The old gentleman became frightened, and suggested that he delegate either the marquis or Philip to act in his place, but Davie peremptorily vetoed the movement.

"No, indeed; I'll have no Marquis de la Vahl or General Shirley, but my dear old-fogy of a papa, in his best necktie and first gloves. It's little Davie inside the lace, and if you will only remember and keep from behind me, we will manage it nicely." The carriage containing the bridesmaids now drove up—three especial cronies, of which one was Susie Johnson—yet, alas! in the sere and yellow leaf of maidenhood. And the bride, after a few

more admonishing instructions to David, was escorted to the carriage by grave-eyed Thad, followed by Ruth and David, Imogene and Philip bringing up the rear, the latter in full uniform in honor of the occasion and to the unbounded delight of the villagers, and Imogene in a magnificent bridal toilet, for it was her first public appearance in Alden *since* her marriage; and fashion, even in a country town, must be deferred to.

Olive and her *cortêge* met them at the church. Murray, in the full splendor of his infant brevet uniform, faced his destiny like a man, stoutly marched up the aisle, and repeated his responses like a hero intent on a domestic altar. Davie kept one eye on her train and the other on her sire, who really acquitted himself creditably, and handed her over to Thaddeus at the proper time, quite as it should be. The solemn ceremony ended, the party re-entered the carriages; the congregation, that had packed the little church to its utmost capacity, swarmed out like bees; and as the gallant general was about to follow his wife into the last carriage in waiting, a loud, enthusiastic cheer broke from the excited crowd for General Shirley. Citizens on whom he had vented his mischief were gray-headed grandfathers now, and boys he had whacked, tall, bewhiskered chaps, whom he privately thought he could thrash yet, in a rough-and-tumble fight, such as had immortalized his youth. The general bowed his thanks; fame was sweet after all, and only the dust of the receding wheels, settling back to the road, was left to the Alden crowd.

The bridal carriages drove to the residence of Mr. Colburn, where a sumptuous wedding collation was in waiting, and the evening train bore away the brides and the bridegrooms, and the marquis, Philip, and Imogene; leaving Lot to his constituency and the *vim* of a tight election, and Mr. and Mrs. Lee to wend their way home, and no Davie to be sunlight in the old house any more.

The gray old couple locked the parlor-door and sat down by the kitchen-hearth; and this little old Ruth and burly old David, their old eyes dim and their old hands clasped, sat and talked softly of their little sunny child.

"It was so when we were young, David," said the old wife.

"Yes, Ruthie; I don't complain. Thad, besides husband, will be father and mother to her, and she will not miss us."

"No, *she will not miss us*," said Ruth, sadly; "and Thaddeus is now, indeed, our son."

The silly old couple kissed each other, as if Ruth's hair was brown and David's darker still, and took their tea alone; Hetty whimpering between times as she brought in the plates and cups and saucers, and whipped out the hot biscuits, so full of tears that one sizzled on the stove, and one came near seasoning the butter, and another found its way into the cream pitcher; but as they were for Davie, it was excused. A score of old shoes lying under the maples and around the front gate testified to the number of good wishes this ancient maiden had sent after her young mistress.

Hetty Smith considerably altered her opinion of the "handsome scamp," when that morning he presented her the neat little sum of 5,000 francs. And her final judgment on Elinor was: "Well, if I was his wife, *I'd stuck*, let him gallavant who he would. Ah, Elinor was weakly intellected anyhow, though I am not one to speak ill of the dead. Say the worst of him, the marquis knows how to reward fidelity and toil, and she was a dreadful child to get along with, and keep in clean aprons."

And here we leave the grumbling Hetty and dear old Ruth and David. The homestead is deserted, the one birdling flown, the foster starling, with its mate, and the boy of adoption doing good afar. And that their lives were so full of blessing to others, reverently we say farewell to Ruth and David.

CHAPTER XLI.

DULCE DOMUM.

IT is generally expected that a novel should end with the marriage of the principal personages, but we are tempted to transgess and give the reader, if we have any, a glimpse of Philip and Imogene after a lapse of four happy married years.

In General Shirley's elegant library, where are stored many trophies and mementoes of the war, is a very small prototype of the great soldier, in his last frocks, and altogether beyond long hair. This second edition, little Phil junior, is just now in a peck of trouble, for, after pulling down a stand of colors artistically arranged in one corner, and arraying the grim bust of Sherman with his papa's belt, and a like marble copy of his sire with a rich silk sash, the property of the original of the last bust, he had found his best boots, and into them a little farther than he had limbs went Master Phil, and was so astonished when he got to the bottom of them to find that he could not get out, that he looked around to see if some one else had not done it. Every effort he made to free himself nearly tripped him up, and so, not being wise enough to tumble down and crawl out of them, he undertook to navigate with them on. In face and figure he was the exact counterpart of his father — dark, short, tough, and a very imp of mischief; only he had Imogene's soft liquid eyes, and wavy hair, tangled about his father's brow, and coming to a curly, unparted point in the middle of his forehead. This was the general's only three-year-old hope, and though scraping across the carpet in his best Napoleons, he was a son to be proud of.

A rapid step in the hall. Phil junior pricked up his ears, and, but for the retarding boots, would have scampered toward the sound. As it was, his little face lighted up, the cherry lips parted from the white teeth — those first dear little cunning white teeth of babyhood, that make a dark rogue of a boy so bewitching, and his hatefulest acts forgivable — and a smile of eager expectancy twinkled from chin to eyes, and burst at last into a gleeful hitching laugh — the hitching caused by stopping to listen. The fat, tawny hands doubled into fists from the intense concentration of delight, and, stationary in his self-imposed stocks, he shouted, "Papa 's tomin! papa 's tomin!" just as the owner of the active steps made himself visible.

"Halloo, Sir Mischief, what are you up to now?" exclaimed the general, whirling around on his heir rather savagely.

But the heir only tittered the louder, as if it was a mighty fine joke he had played on his parent.

"You have been raising Cain, you young rascal; what do you mean by making a horse out of my dress sword, and a clothes-line out of my sash, sir?" demanded Phil senior.

Phil junior looked ruefully at his boots.

"I tan't dit 'um off, papa."

"I am glad of it; it will keep you quiet for a minute, at any rate."

"Please tate 'um off, papa; I tan't," implored little Phil.

"No, sir; I 'll keep you in them in punishment of this ruin."

"I want to tiss you, papa."

This usually brought the obdurate sire to terms, and now he could hardly hide a smile.

"Come here, then, if your affection is so warm."

"I tan't, da won't tom off, papa."

The little fellow went to work at the boots again, with-

out a thought of crying about it, or in the least intimidated by his parent's sternness. General Shirley went to the door and called, in an injured tone:

"Gypsy, come here."

"Yes, Philip," answered a voice from above; and in a moment Imogene came in.

"Now look here, Gypsy, I can't stand this; just see my reports, will you; torn, and scattered, and chewed beyond redemption. The young scoundrel ought to be thrashed soundly." The mother looked not at the soiled reports, but at the "young scoundrel," who caught her eye.

"Tate 'um off, mamma; da won't tom off for me."

You may be sure Imogene was not long about setting him at liberty, and lifted him out of the imprisoning boots without further appeal.

"I know it is provoking, Philip, but don't call him such names," straightening the bust of Sherman, and picking up the sword. "He does not think he has done any harm."

"Yes, he does, confound him! The trouble is I am not stern enough with him. The rascal don't care a copper for me."

"He is troublesome, and full of boisterous spirits and vigorous health, but he comes honestly by it, for he is the *fac-simile* of another Philip Shirley, the very embryo of yourself; and destructive and hard to manage as he is, *you* ought not to find fault with him."

"Oh, well; hang it! look at my papers; and swords and pistols are not exactly the things for a gentleman of his age to play with. It is not his fault if he did not get it out of the scabbard." Master Phil had gone back to the boot-straps, entirely unconscious that he was the subject of the parental dialogue, but he instantly obeyed his mother's voice.

"Come here, dear. Now go tell papa you are sorry."

He immediately dropped the fascinating straps, and trotted across to his father. He did not think of anything but the ignominy of being baffled by the boots, and, looking up as he clung to his coat, said, readily:

"I is sorry, papa; I tood n't dit 'em off," looking back for his mother's commendation.

"There, Imogene, is penitence for you."

She put her hand on his little head, the jetty ringlets curling around her fingers of themselves.

'He did not understand me: tell papa you are sorry you touched his things, and you won't do so any more."

Phil junior trotted back again.

"I 's sorry, papa; I won't do so no more, *if you put 'em high.*"

"You see, Gypsy, he repents conditionally; I am to put the things out of his reach, and then he agrees to be good. What in the old Harry is he doing in here, anyway?"

"I have been out, and he must have escaped from the nurse. I have been over to see Davie."

"And how is the child?"

"Dead, Philip."

"Eh?"

"Yes; Thad's boy is still enough now; two little hands running over with rosebuds on his breast that the marble fingers do not care to touch, and two little white feet that have lost their music are lying mute; a little head lies quiet on a satin pillow, and a little face, cold and white as a snow-wreath, without voice, or sight, or feeling, lies awaiting a coffin in the senator's home. Thaddeus and Vida have no son."

"I am sorry for them; but little David was always a pale, sickly child, not a bit like our tawny-skinned, healthy scamp here," looking down at the tawny scamp more benignly.

"I know it, dear; but he was just the age of our Phil, and seeing Davie's little child so quiet I — I cannot scold mine to-day."

General Shirley picked up his boy as if he were India-rubber, and tossed him to his shoulder with a force that took away the junior's breath, but nevertheless tickled him hugely.

"If little David is dead, why, Gyp, I 'll agree not to scold our little chap either. Let him go it; give him full swing, and if he tears the house down, let it come; I 'll take his hint, and put the dangerous articles, at least, up high. He *does* come honestly by his nature, and though he is as brown as an Indian, he is as smart as a whip, nothing of the pale spiritual in him, an out-and-out mischievous, harum-scarum boy, just as I would have him."

Philip sat down, and little Phil was not long in getting on his kneee. Clasping his chubby arms about his neck, he again went off in a series of private titters that was amusing to nobody but himself.

Notwithstanding the general called him such hard names, this boy was his idol, and when he was in the house was pretty sure to be either on his knee, climbing his chair-back, or following close at his heels; and from this undue intimacy, Phil junior had lost all fear of Phil senior, and cut his pranks about the haughty general as unconcernedly as he pulled his nurse's hair or hid his mother's slippers; yet he was so merry and good-hearted beneath it all, that, although frequently reprehended, he was never known to get a thrashing, and lorded it from cook to father in the most independent, free-and-easy way common to three-year-old tyrants.

"I called on Mrs. Murray, too, Philip, and found them rejoicing there. *Twins.* Walter is nearly wild, and such cunning little beauties as they are! mostly eyes now, but

I told Olive that they would get over that peculiarity of young infants, which greatly relieved the father."

"By George! if Murray populates his domestic altar at this rate the brevet will hardly suffice. It is lucky Olive has a fortune, else the juvenile Murrays might come to want, despite my patronage."

Imogene did not heed, for she was looking at little Phil dozing on his father's breast.

"Shall I take him, Philip; he is going to sleep?"

"No. When did little David die?"

"An hour before I arrived. Thad's eyes are sadder now than ever, and Davie — well, she has met a real grief, and is crying so that she cannot get asleep." Imogene knelt beside his chair, and folded her hands on her husband's unoccupied knee. His arm clasped closer his slumbering child, because Davie's was so cold and his so warm. The silky-fringed eyelids quivered, and the rosy lips curled in a smile, for the child-dreams were sweet, and not an ache, or a pain, or a trouble in the perfect little body. Philip's disengaged arm went around his wife.

"I'll never call him a harsh name again, Gypsy; although I do not mean it, if he were dead I would not like to remember it. He is my image in looks, figure, and disposition, and I will bear with him."

Imogene placed her hand on the one of his caressing little Phil's, and the three, husband, wife, and child, were breathing very softly, but speaking not a word. The mother's face went down to the child's, and then up to her husband.

"Our lives have drifted into a peaceful haven after all the storms, Philip."

"Yes, darling. I have power and position, and stand not far behind the first; but my wife and child are my best glory. *Now* I enjoy my renown. I have satisfied my

ambition and my heart. I have won fame, and I have won a home, and the angels in it have won me."

She looked up in his face, trusting, confiding still; the baby nestled a little nearer, and Philip was happy in that they were his. And thus lovingly, as it was raised, the curtain goes down between them and us forever.

THE END.

765

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